

A Collection of Articles by

His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas



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A Collection of Articles by
His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

Edited by
Dr. Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil

Mor Adai Study Centre
Cheeranchira
Changanaserry-686 106

**A Collection of Articles by
His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas**
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

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Published in book form in 2013 by
Mor Adai Study Centre
Cheeranchira, Changanaserry - 686 106
Kerala - India
Mob: 944 620 3002, Tel: 0481 272 4353
Email: moolelachen@yahoo.com
Web: www.moradaistudycenter.org

Printed at DC Press (P) Ltd., Kottayam

First Published in the Festschrift to honor H.H
Ignatius Zakka I edited by Dr. Kuriakose
Corepiscopa Moolayil and published by St.
George Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church,
Chicago, U.S.A.

Price: ₹ 150.00 Overseas U.S. \$20.00

Publisher's Note

His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East was enthroned to the patriarchate in 1980. I was then a young priest of 25 and filled with enthusiasm and owe to the holy throne tried to pursue to gather the contributions in life of this great personality. I was told by many that His Holiness had a very wonderful interlocutors background from his youth ages. He was secretary to the greatest scholar Patriarch of the modern era of the Syrian Orthodox Church, namely His holiness Ignatius Apream I Barsaum.

H.H. Zakka I is well known in the ecumenical world in Pro Oriente consultations and World Council of Churches. He was the archbishop of Baghdad, Iraq in its glorious period. He was chosen by God to discover the holy relics of St. Thomas. A part of this holy relics was given to Catholicos Augen I in 1965 as the token of unity in the divided Malankara Church. Archbishop Mor Severius Zakka was also included in the delegations led by His Holiness Yacoob III to India to install the then Catholicos in the united Church in 1964.

His Holiness is an apostle of peace and he expressed his utmost desire for reconciliation in Malankara in his maiden address as the Patriarch and also in the first encyclical to Malankara. Again, after the supreme court judgement in 1995 he waited for years in the reconciliation effort in vain Nevertheless, His Holiness will be remembered as an angel of peace and unity.

In the year of 2005, I took an initiative to collect the major articles and presentations by His Holiness to include in the Patriarchal Silver Jubilee Souvenir published in Chicago. My dear friends Dr. George Kiraz and Dr. Thomas Joseph worked together to gather all the major articles written by His Holiness. Theodore Issa supported us by translating one lengthy article written in Arabic, while His Holiness was a priest. This was the first ever translation of the said article into English.

The collection of articles, encyclicals, ecumenical agreements and major speeches were all well received by people all over the world. Many were requesting me to prepare a book based on the article of His Holiness. Recently H. G. Mor Aprem Mathews Metropolitan took the task of finding resources for this project and this long cherished dream is becoming a reality. I am sure many will be benefited by this book. A wide spectrum of articles on the faith and history of the Syrian Orthodox Church is included in this collection. The Continuing programme of this work should be a Malayalam translation. I hope someone will come forward to work with me in this project in the coming future.

His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I is the pride of the Syrian church all over. He is in his 34th year of his blessed Patriarchate. I seek apostolic blessings from him and with all humility submit this book before His Holiness for the glory of the Church.

Dr. Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil
Director, Mor Adai Study Centre

JACOBITE SYRIAN CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Under the Holy Apostolic See of Antioch and all the East
ANGAMALY DIOCESE - PERUMBAVOOR REGION

MATHEWS APHREM

Asst. Metropolitan of Perumbavoor Region

BY THE GRACE OF GOD



Blessing in the name of lord to our beloved spiritual son Very. Rev. Kuriakose Corepiscopa.

Dearly beloved,

We read carefully the book published under the title Articles of A Collection of Articles by His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas . This book is a compilation of various articles written by H.H. Ignatius zakka I Iwas Patriarch, the supreme head of our church. Our holy father is prolific writer and a man of clear theological vision. His Holiness has made systematic theological expositions of various issues pertaining to faith and tradition of our church. the present book reflects different areas of theology like christology, ecclesiology, sacrament, history, ecumenism, etc

In the orthodox church tradition, salvation is intrinsically linked together with vision of God. In order to be saved, we need to have clear vision of God. Salavation entails not only good deeds but also right percepective of God. Therefore, purity in faith has always been emphasised in our church tradition. This is the reason for our struggle for maintaining right faith throughout history. The synchronism between right faith and right vision of God is one of the salient features of our church. The present work of His Holiness will enable us to extend our horizon of understanding of God, human being and the world.

As faith is dynamic, we should articulate faith of the church in the changing world by employing new catagories. In this book His Holiness recounts important theological issues in simple langauge and clarifies doctrinal positions of our church. Since theology is considered to be the langauge of people, this book will enble our faithfull to understand faith of our church.

At this juncture we congratulate our Corepiscopa for bringing out this book for the glory of our church. May Almighty God strengthen him to publish more books in this line.

May God bless you

Mathews Aphrem

Mor Adai Study Centre

Mor Adai Study Centre is a voluntary organization constituted in the Syrian Orthodox Church to promote humane and literary activities in the Church. We have published 29 books in English and Malayalam since the establishment in 2001. We are happy that our books are being counted as most beneficial to the Church and its readers. We are indebted to the Director Board Members and the Book Club Members who are promoting us in this venture.

Director Board is constituted by those who volunteer to support this project by contributing \$ 250.00 (Rs. 10,000/-) or above. They will assist the Executive Director for the work and growth of MASC. They will be given copies of all the books published anywhere in the world free of cost and mailing charges and they will form the General Body of the MASC. Their suggestions and decisions will be the directives for the future development of the MASC.

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1 IDENTITY OF THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

It would be most helpful to remind you of the identity of our Holy Church: The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, the apostolic see of which was established in AD 37 by St. Peter, the chief of apostles in Antioch, the ancient capital of Syria. It is therefore, a Syrian Church. The faithful of this church are called Syrians after the name of Syria. At the dawn of Christianity members of this church were the people who had settled in upper and lower Mesopotamia and were either Jews or pagans who spoke Aramaic Syriac which was the vernacular language of ancient Syria. They were converted to Christianity through the ministry of the apostles and disciples who scattered after the martyrdom of Archdeacon St. Stephen in Jerusalem. Many of them came to Antioch to preach the Holy Gospel, and multitudes of Jews and pagans were converted to Christianity by their efforts. St. Peter consecrated two bishops for them: St. Evodios for the conversion of Gentiles and Pagans, and St. Ignatius the Illuminator for the conversion of Jews into Christianity. St. Ignatius united the

two groups after St. Evodios had departed to his heavenly reward. He was the one who called the church 'universal' being the first to use the term as an attribute of the Church.

The Vernacular of the Syrian Church

Our venerable Syrian Fathers used their Aramaic-Syriac in preaching the Holy Gospel and were capable of ministering the Gospel of salvation in the Middle East, India, China, Ethiopia and other countries of the world using their Syriac language clearly and simply. They used this language in writing hymns, prayers and liturgical books. They also translated universal cultures into Syriac and afterwards into other various languages. Syriac has been the official and liturgical language of our church up to the present day. It is, therefore, our sacred duty to maintain it and teach it to our children. It is the holy language spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, His blessed mother the Virgin Mary and His holy apostles.

Jurisdiction of the Apostolic See of Antioch

The apostolic see of Antioch

* The holy synod of the church has also permitted to use the name as 'Syriac' Orthodox.

occupies a highly esteemed position in Christendom. Throughout our study of Church history over the ages, we can see that the geographical content of our church jurisdiction, as specified by the Council of Nicea (325), has gone beyond the ancient geographic borders as Syrians spread throughout the world, coming under the jurisdiction of the apostolic see of Antioch, wherever they settled or dwelled.

Active Members in the Syrian Church

An active member in the body of the Syrian Church is one who adheres to the true orthodox faith, received from our Holy Fathers and to the just doctrine specified in the three Ecumenical Councils convened in Nicaea(325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431). He is that member who is well committed to the Syrian Orthodox tradition and loyal to the legitimate spiritual leadership of the Church.

Dear brethren, in my capacity as successor to St. Peter, the chief of the apostles, I do address you using the same words with which St. Peter addressed the strangers: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the Blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied" (I Peter 1:2).

One Body

We, the Syrian Orthodox,

are all one in our Lord Jesus Christ, one in our church which is the mystical body of Christ and one in our holy apostolic see of Antioch which represents the supreme spiritual authority in the Church. No matter how varied we are as people and as nationalities, how different the civilizations we belong to and the languages we speak, we are one in our apostolic patrimony, our religious doctrine, our Syriac language and supreme spiritual leadership. Our forefathers shed their blood for the sake of preserving these principles and securing liberty in our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Meaning of Freedom

Our spiritual concept of real freedom is to live according to God's law and abide by His judgment. In other words, we follow the orthodox path by being righteous, holy and God-fearing, meanwhile adhering to the true faith and abiding by the constitution, laws and rules of the Church. We thus set a good example for the citizens in the countries wherever we live.

Church Hierarchy and the Faithful our Church comprises the hierarchy and the faithful. Authority in the Church is purely religious and restricted to the hierarchy who are in charge of the Church at the authoritative, teaching and judicial levels. It is the Church that Jesus Christ

referred to when addressing the apostles: "He who hears you, hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:16). It is also the Church that He referred to when addressing the person whose brother trespassed against him commending him to go and tell him his fault: "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church". But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Assuredly, I say to you, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

The laity, on the other hand, have their role to play in the life of the Church. However, the Church is not a secular, mundane institution nor a charitable association, but a spiritual institution whose authority is derived from heaven. It is the authority of the clergy only that governs the Church on the religious, spiritual and social levels.

All the institutions within the Church must obtain their legitimacy and their right to function from the clerical authority otherwise, they shall be deemed as alien to the body of the Church and shall, therefore, be rejected, whatever purposes they might have been established for in

the first place and regardless of the objectives they are trying to fulfill.

They would still be considered as alien to the Church, no matter how good their means are, unless they derive their legitimacy from the spiritual leadership. Hence beware of those who attempt to break the ranks in the Church under the false pretext of unifying it.

A crucial point in the life of the Church

Our church today is at crossroads: either to go back to its pure original sources, adhere to its honorable and ancient traditions, keep pursuing its great values as characteristic of our great Fathers, or follow new theories that attempt to destroy the pillars of God's kingdom, thus creating chaos in the divine Church management.

Thanks to God Almighty for helping us reject every weird theory that is foreign to our patrimony and our glorious Church history.

We do absolutely repudiate any distortion of our identity or any corruption of our precious civilized heritage. We have deep convictions that the Church established by the Lord Jesus on the solid rock of faith shall never be shaken and the gates of hell shall never subdue it. We must look forward to a better future for our Holy Church, depending on adequate and detailed studies that might serve as scheduled plans

for the spiritual functioning of the Church. We must, moreover, have practical application of these plans.

Church Constitution and Enforcement

Every institution has a constitution, rules and regulations of its own. They are considered to be binding. Every constitution and every law has three basic elements: firstly, the party establishing the constitution; secondly, the party declaring it; thirdly, the party abiding by it.

The constitution of our Church has been set up by the Holy Synod presided over by the Patriarch, who retains the right to amend the constitution and revise it. The Patriarch is also entitled to have it declared to all the faithful in the Church so that it becomes binding. All the faithful must obey the constitution of the Church, its laws, regulations and pronounced judgments.

Obedience to the decisions of the Holy General and Local Synods convened and presided over by the Patriarch has been inherited from our Holy Fathers. Decisions of these synods are considered as binding on the part of the Church in general. Each diocese has a Board consisting of the bishop and clergy and another composed of trustees of the laity. The latter has its own by-laws, set up by the Holy Synod

and confirmed by His Holiness the Patriarch for the government of its members and the regulation of its affairs. Both the board of clergy and the board of trustees have the power to set up by-laws that do not conflict with the constitution of the Church, its general law and judgments, nor with the decisions of the Holy Synods or the laws of the country where the diocese is established.

Prayer and Sacrifice

Our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the example of giving and sacrificing. It is therefore mandatory that we, in our turn, sacrifice our leisure time or rather the time we consider as greatly valuable, devoting it to the worship of God Almighty, spiritually and truthfully, never complaining of lack of time for participation in prayer with the congregation. We shall never be able to have adequate sacrifices to God Almighty if we are incapable of being generous in devoting time for prayer to God and for the Church.

It is the duty of all the hierarchy to celebrate the daily offices in the morning and evening according to the tradition of our Holy Church. They must devote their time to the glorification of God, seeking mercy from him for themselves and for the community, entrusted to them so that the Church may enjoy success, progress and prosperity.

We shall not be considered as generous and benefactors before God unless we devote our time and offer our finances and possessions as the widow did, donating the two brass pennies which were all she possessed to the temple. Likewise, local churches will not be considered as loyal to the diocese unless they fulfill their duties towards it as a whole.

The dioceses, in their turn, must fulfill their duties towards the Holy Patriarchal See. As such, they will set a good example for Church unity. As true believers, we are bound to feel that we are one unified body, as tree and its branches are.

Obedience is better than Sacrifice

All followers of Jesus Christ shall endeavor to have Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, as their ideal in His obedience to His heavenly Father.

Bearing in mind that the motto of the Church is the statement: "to obey is better than sacrifice" (I Samuel 15:22). It is also the duty of the local spiritual authorities to have mutual recognition according to Church laws; and the laity shall have to pay due respect to Church hierarchies so that order shall prevail everywhere in the Church.

Jesus Christ is our Ideal

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our ideal in life in His humbleness

and His sympathy for people's sufferings, His sharing in their hopes, their joys and grievances, His love for little children, His discourses with young people and His forgiveness of sinners. He commanded us that we follow in His footsteps saying: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30).

Dear brethren, you, as members of your local churches, do constitute the local congregations.

You are brothers and sisters who have been called upon to follow in the Lord Jesus' footsteps wherever you are, in church, at home or at work. This would imply that each one of you shall have to work for the glory of God in proportion with the charisma God has endowed you with, making use of this gift for the benefit of the community in which you live. Each one shall have to feel committed to have those sublime virtues consolidated in their thoughts, minds and hearts in order that their life be in harmony with God's will.

Congregation and the Priest

We do urge you in our sermons to interact in your spiritual life within the congregation in which you are the living members. Share this spiritual life with your

brothers and sisters so that you all become one heart and one thought with your priest whom you call "our father".

It is worth noting that what distinguishes our Holy Church from other Churches is the spiritual role to be played by the priest in the congregation. He is the spiritual father of every member of the family that belongs to this congregation. His relationship with each person must be deep and strong.

The ties you maintained in your home country must be kept in the diaspora, and you must desire to preserve this spiritual bond between the priest and members of the congregation whether young or old, male or female.

The Church hierarchy shall have to render their spiritual services to their spiritual children enthusiastically and zealously because these faithful are the articulate foundation stones upon which the spiritual edifice of the Church is constructed.

The Sacrament of Matrimony

In the context of our discourse about families, we are bound to say something about the sacrament of matrimony which is one of the seven holy sacraments of the Church. We are obliged to respect this sacrament whether at home or in the diaspora. We are called upon to follow the example set by our

fathers in our mother countries. Our fathers observed and honored this sacrament with solemnity throughout the ages.

Bringing Children Up

The first and most important objective of the sacrament of matrimony is giving birth to children. Parents are bound to be not only the biological parents of their children, but their spiritual ones as well so that these children be born to God by grace and be heirs of His heavenly kingdom.

It is the responsibility of Church patrons and parents to cooperate in bringing these children up in a good Christian manner. For Jesus Christ highly regards children in the community, saying: "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me" (Mark 9:37).

Youth in the Church

Young people are so dear to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus, glory be to Him, became man, assuming thus our human nature except sin, He performed all His declared divine economy in the flesh on earth as an adult. Now Christ has keen interest in working through young people for the salvation of people. Hence, we do urge our young spiritual children to get involved in the spiritual and social activities

f the Church. Solomon's words: "The first step towards wisdom is the fear of God" could serve as a reminder. Furthermore, God hearing is, in our opinion, the ultimate goal.

Women in the Church

Our Syrian Orthodox Church has granted women their religious and social rights, recognizing their merit and honoring them in the person of the Virgin Mary who conceived God incarnate in her womb and gave birth to Christ miraculously. Thus she was called *Theotokos* (Mother of God). It was Jesus Christ's will to reveal Himself after resurrection to women first. Some women served Him and His disciples when He was in the flesh, traveling and doing good.

It is clear that women in the Syrian Church occupy a highly elevated position as deaconesses, nuns, mothers of holy fathers and women dedicating their lives to chastity and celibacy. When women are good members in the Church of God, their children will consequently be good and virtuous. It is absolutely true that women can lend a hand for the progress of the Church and the community.

They are capable of training choirs in the church and conducting Bible studies in community centers or Sunday schools, as they might be called by

some in the Diaspora.

They are capable of starting charitable societies to serve the orphans, widows and the poor. They can also give good advice for the progress and development of the Church community. Therefore, we urge our spiritual daughters to do their best to fulfill their duties towards serving the Church.

A World in need of Peace

One unequivocal and bitter truth is the imbalanced and unstable world of today.

Admittance of such a truth is little more than a confession that the world is nothing but the reflection of human conscience. This is not restricted to our generation, but applies to all previous generations and those to come.

The problems encountering us, materially and spiritually, are more complicated than those faced by previous generations. In short, technology in highly civilized countries is advancing rapidly on all levels and in different settings. The aftermath of this progress, however, is man's transformation into a dumb machine and his grave spiritual loss, thus increasing human misery on earth. We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is the remedy and the solution for our complicated problems and those created by changes imposed by modern civilization and depriving

man of happiness. The role the church is to present Jesus, the King of peace, to the world.

This would have a great impact on the life of modern man through this spiritual peace bestowed on him in his daily life by Christ.

What we are presently in need of is true repentance; that is spiritual renewal which would be the best impetus that might encourage us to work with full responsibility and extreme courage for creating a new world full of peace as peace is the most significant need today. We do exhort you, dear faithful, to share in our prayer to God Almighty to enlighten the minds and hearts of world leaders to work on enhancing social Justice and universal peace throughout the world.

Christian Unity

We live in an age of ecumenical movements. The majority of Christians believe that Christian unity is the main objective, the ultimate goal and the most exalted end leading to the fulfillment of the Lord Jesus' desire in His last prayer, "that you may be one".

Needless to say, our divisions have become a stumbling block

since the basis of Christian unity is the love of God and neighbor.

Therefore, if we, as Christians, are incapable of loving one another, how could we be faithful witnesses to our Lord Jesus Christ?

How could the fruitful real love be manifested in our daily life? In relevance to this, the Apostle Paul says: "Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;... Love never fails." (I Corinthians 13:4-8).

Let us keep praying that we may love one another as members in the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church, and to love all people. Our top priority must first be the improvement of mutual relations between churches and then between believers of good will of other religions, as well as the improvement of our relations with other international communities.

Excerpts of interest from the speech delivered by His Holiness at the twenty-fifth annual Convention of the dioceses of USA and Canada, held in Los Angeles, California, 1986. Published in *The Patriarchal Magazine*, (January 1987)

2

TRADITION

Tradition is, basically, the spiritual teaching we have inherited from the Holy Apostles and Church Fathers. Tradition is divine, apostolic or patriarchal.

Divine tradition is that teaching given by Jesus Christ directly and by word of mouth to the Holy Apostles. It was not recorded in a book until later through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit¹. It includes the New Testament and the truths of faith.

Apostolic tradition, on the other hand, includes the teachings of the Apostles, their laws and the messages they handed down to their disciples and their immediate successors orally. What has been handed down is based on the divine tradition from which apostolic tradition derives its power. These teachings and this legacy, although not written in the Holy Scripture, conform to its teachings.

They are never in contradiction with them and are considered to be the faithful testimony to the authenticity and true interpretation of the Divine proclamation, better

yet, an aid to its understanding.

Apostolic tradition includes constitutions of faith which are derived from God and established by the Apostles; it also includes the seven Church Sacraments, enacted laws and liturgies established for the Church such as the Holy Liturgy.

Patriarchal tradition, however, is what the Holy Church has received from the dawn of its history from its Holy Fathers. It includes noble statutes based on the teachings of the Holy Apostles with respect to the interpretation of doctrines; exegesis of the Holy Scripture, organization of religious rites and enactment of laws, especially decisions taken by the holy synods and works of some Church Fathers, such as Patriarch Kyriakos (+817) and laws enacted by them.

How Ancient is Tradition²

Tradition is more ancient than the recording of the Holy Scriptures. Several generations prior to the recording of the Holy Scriptures and according to the rules of the Old Testament,

successors used to receive from their predecessors the belief in one God and they abided by what was known as the law of conscience. Moreover, worship of God and offering animal sacrifices were handed down from one person to another. The eldest son in the family was considered as its religious leader and also the chief in charge of its civil affairs. The believers used to verbally pass on stories of antiquity and historical events, such as the story of creation, the creation of man, man's fall, the chronicle of redemption, which included the history of early fathers, the call of Abraham and his temptation, the Covenant promises of God to Abraham and His offspring by passing the law of circumcision as a mark of this Covenant as well as other events that took place through the ages and were handed down generation after generation until the coming of prophet Moses who was divinely inspired to record these events. Moses was given the Ten Commandments as written laws. He also recorded also all necessary laws, which he received from God.

Tradition kept being observed among people of the Old Testament, in spite of not having the laws recorded. This is clear as the Holy Scripture instructs people thus: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying 'This is done because of what the Lord did for me when

I came up from Egypt" (Exodus 13:8). And "Ask your father, and he will show you; Your elders, and they will tell you" (Deuteronomy 32:7). Undoubtedly, verbal teaching was extremely necessary, because the majority of people were illiterate.

In Christianity as well, tradition preceded the recording of the New Testament as the Lord Jesus never recorded his Gospel and did not hand it over in a written form.

He preached the Gospel of salvation, calling people to repentance. It was by word of mouth that Jesus gave the Holy Gospel over to His Holy apostles and they, in their turn, kept it by heart as did most of His disciples did.

When the Lord Jesus sent His disciples into the world to preach the Gospel, saying: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He did not command them to write this Good News, neither did He demand that it be kept unwritten. It was when some of the Apostles were asked to record what they had preached that the Holy Gospel was written down through the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who kept them free from fault or error according to the Lord's promise to them. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring

to your remembrance, all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). The explanation of this truth could be found in what had been penned by Luke the Evangelist in the introduction to his Gospel, saying: "In as much as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke 1:1-4).

Gospel and Tradition

The Holy Gospel which is the Gospel of salvation is a testimony to what the disciples of the Lord Jesus have seen and heard from Him. What was therefore written down in the Gospel was exactly what had been first preached verbally by the disciples. Having had the Holy Gospel recorded, the Holy Church attested to its authenticity, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and rejected apocryphal Gospels depending on the testimonies of the Holy Apostles, the righteous disciples and their venerable successors.

It goes without saying that

the Christian Church came into being much earlier than the New Testament was recorded and that it had been established for a period of time during which only the Old Testament was recorded. The believers then had the Holy Gospel circulated among themselves by word of mouth and memorize it, later spreading it throughout the world. The first to pen the Holy Gospel was the Apostle Matthew in Aramaic in the year AD 39. The last book of the New Testament is the Book of Revelation which was written by John in Greek between AD 90- 100.

It is true that tradition preceded the composition of the Holy Scripture, and that the Holy Church attested to the authenticity and validity of these books, yet they have derived their authority directly from the Holy Spirit Who spoke through the Prophets and Apostles, preserving thus the teachings and doctrines of the Church, inspiring Church Fathers, reminding them of all that had been said by Jesus Christ to His disciples, guiding them to the truth because he is the Spirit of Truth emanating from the Father.

The scholar Origen (185-253) has stated: "I have come to know the four Gospels through tradition, and I believe that they are unique." And Augustus (354-430) stated: "I would not have believed in the Gospel had I not

been convinced by the voice of the Universal Church.”²

As tradition is more ancient than the written Gospel, whoever receives the teachings of the Holy Gospel shall, no doubt, receive the divine and apostolic traditions spontaneously. No one can receive the Gospel, yet reject tradition so long as the Gospel is considered as part of tradition.

Both the Gospel and tradition form one entity and neither one can be dispensed with as each one completes the other.

There are many texts in the Holy Gospel indicating that the Holy Apostles did not record in the Gospel every saying of the Lord Jesus nor every deed done by Him. A conspicuous evidence of authenticity of this is what the Apostle John said at the conclusion of his Gospel: “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true” (John 21:24). He also said: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30).

Many other verses uttered by Jesus and many other deeds done by Him, but never mentioned in

the recorded Gospel, have become part of the divine tradition, such as what the Lord had revealed to his disciples for forty days after His Resurrection and until His Ascension into Heaven as shown in the Book of Acts: “To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). The Book of Acts, however, makes no mention of anything about these matters, and had none of these teachings recorded in it. We are quite certain, however, that these teachings were orally conveyed to the believers who memorized, circulated and passed them on generation after generation.

Apostolic Tradition

Some apostles and disciples penned the Holy Gospel and some others wrote epistles which were joined to the New Testament. Those books, however, did not include all what they had preached to the world and all that had been said or done by the Lord Jesus throughout his divine economy in the flesh.

Some other apostles and disciples never recorded anything, but these were preached verbally. Some of them wrote books, but we never had these books included in the New Testament, Yet, we did have

some of their teachings conveyed to us through tradition. We have received from early Church Fathers the laws attributed to the apostles and the rules they established for the structure of the Church. We did also receive the valuable doctrines they had verbally handed over to the Church, but never recorded in the New Testament. Nevertheless, these teachings have been practiced by the Church ever since the dawn of its existence, such as the observance of Sunday instead of the Hebrew Sabbath, the baptism of children and other verbal teachings. The Apostle John said in one of his epistles: "Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full" (II John 12 & III John 13, 14).

This teaching which has been handed down by word of mouth by the Apostles to the Church is the verbal apostolic tradition which could be an explanation of truths of the faith, an elucidation of the good doctrines, an interpretation of the teachings of the Lord or an arrangement of one of the worship rituals and the like.

Having been inspired by the Holy Spirit to complete whatever might be needed for the organization of the Holy Church in accordance with the requirements of time, such as the establishment of the office of deacons in

the Church, the election and appointment of the seven deacons to care for the Church (Acts 6:1-8), the convocation of Synods, such as the Synod of Jerusalem (AD 51), and taking decisions they considered to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, apostles and disciples wrote: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us" (Acts 15:28). Moreover, the working of the Holy Spirit is apparent, especially at the election of bishops and sending them away to minister, as quoted in the Acts of the Apostle: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: 'Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away" (Acts 13:2).

The Holy Spirit's role in the organization of the Church was not surprising to the apostles for the Lord had formerly told them about it saying: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13). So this guidance to all truth encompassed not only what had been written down in the Holy Scripture but the teaching and arrangement as well which the disciples had become capable of understanding and bearing after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. All this conforms with the

teaching of the Scripture, yet has never been recorded in it. It was passed on verbally by the Fathers; and the Apostle Paul commands his disciple Timothy in this regard, saying: "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit these to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2). And he says to the Thessalonians: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thessalonians 2:15). And in relation to the Apostle Paul's explanation of the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist to the Corinthians, he elucidates the fact that the apostolic tradition is based on the divine tradition by saying: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you'" (I Corinthians 11:23). And the Apostle Paul concludes by saying: "And the rest I will set in order when I come" (I Corinthians 11:34).

Patriarchal Tradition

With such words, the Apostle Paul defers explanation of some organizational or liturgical matters until going to meet them.

These matters which he

conveyed face to face, and which the Church circulated and passed through tradition generation after generation, have been kept intact by the Holy Spirit up to the present date and have been practiced by the Universal Church in different languages and in the contexts of different local civilizations.

Patriarchal tradition is also based on apostolic tradition in relation to liturgical regulations and canon laws. And both traditions are based on Divine tradition in terms of admitting the authenticity of the Holy Scripture and truths of faith.

Ever since the dawn of Christianity, tradition has always occupied a sublime position in Christian apostolic Churches. In the chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea³, the following was written about the Martyr Saint Ignatius the Illuminator (+ 107), the disciple of the Apostle John and Bishop of Antioch: "History reports that he was sent from Syria to Rome, and became a prey to the beasts because of his testimony to Christ. And throughout his trip in the middle of Asia, he was kept under strict military guard. He used to empower churches in different cities wherever he stayed through homilies and advices, encouraging believers to stick to the traditions of the apostles. Moreover he found it necessary that these traditions be supported

by written proofs and by giving these traditions a fixed form for guaranteeing their intactness.”

* *Patriarchal Magazine* (January - March, 1990), pp. 91-93.

1. Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum I, *Alhak Alkanoni*, chps. 22 & 23. Art. 112-120.

2. Habeeb Jerjis, *The Orthodox Rock, Egypt* (1961), p.125.

3. Eusebius of Caesarea, *History of the Church*, trans. by Rev. Father Mark David, Cairo ed. (1960), 3 vol., ch. 26, p. 151, .

3

THE MYSTERIES OF INCARNATION AND REDEMPTION

Appropriate Testimony and Confirmation*

Rabban Fr. Zakka Bashir Iwas

Theodora Issa (Translator)¹

Preface

On 24th January 1959 a friend of mine “Brobest Joachim² Philikt”, the Head of the Lutheran Church in Jerusalem, prompted me to attend the “Jerusalem Conference” with an invitation on behalf of the German Theological Academy. The conference was scheduled to be held on 15th and 16th April primarily to discuss the topic, “The nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Chalcedonian Council.” This invitation included a request for a speech to be delivered by myself on the position of our Syrian Orthodox Church on this topic.

Following the receipt of permission from H.H. Moran Mor Ignatius Ya‘qub III, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East³, I attended this conference and gave

the required lecture, titled “*One Nature of God the Incarnated Word.*” I wrote this lecture in a very simple language, exerting every effort to stay away from complex theological and philosophical expressions and phrases. Therefore, I treated and explained the topic from a merely historical point of view, proving the dogma of our Holy Church through the presentation of obvious and unambiguous proofs, derived from both the scripture and cognitive research, with some testimonies that were derived from those who failed to agree with this dogma. This lecture was delivered at the first session of this conference, and was simultaneously translated into English and German.

It is worthwhile to note here that Dr. Fredreich Hayer, theology professor at the German Academy mentioned above, who was the chair of the conference, had the following comments on this lecture:

Permission for printing [the Arabic edition] was issued on 3rd July 1959 by H.H. Moran Mor Ignatius Ya‘qub III (d. 1980), Patriarch of Antioch and all the East.

“We have become convinced with the proof presented by the lecturer that the Chalcedonian Council meetings were not convened with blessing of the Holy Spirit. Further, following this lecture it became apparent to all of us that the doctrine of the Eastern Oriental Orthodox Churches confesses one nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ after the union from two united natures, and one person from two united persons, without confusion, mixture, division or corruption. These churches reject the Chalcedonian Council and its dogma. These churches are not the followers of Eutyches as we incorrectly used to think. These churches excommunicate Nestorius, and his dogma. Therefore, the onus is on each and every one of us and the responsibility lays in our hands upon return to our home lands to explain and amend the

wrongful, unjust and unlawful history [of animosity] towards these churches”.

Representatives from the Syrian, Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopian Churches joined those representing different branches of the Protestant Churches—Episcopal, Scriptural, and Lutheran—who attended this conference. Those representatives gathered in Jerusalem from Jordan, Germany, Canada, Belgium and several other countries.

Thus, with God’s blessings, and at the request of several of the zealous virtuous people, I publish this lecture as a tool for the dear reader to truly understand the divine truth, the ancient and pure Christian dogma.

Homs, 30th June 1959

Rabban Fr. Zakka Bashir Iwas*

One Nature of God the Incarnated Word

1. A brief explanation on the mystery of the incarnation and the redemption¹ When the first man fell into sin, this sin enveloped the whole man kind. “*Just as sin entered into the world by one man, and*

death by means of sin, so death was imposed upon all men, inasmuch as they all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). “*They are all gone astray and they have been rejected; there is none who does good, no, not one.*

* Now the blessed patriarch H.H. Ignatius Zakka Iwas

But the righteousness of God is by the faith of Jesus Christ to every one, also to every man who believes in him, for there is no discrimination” (Romans 3:12 & 22). “As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one”. This sin was infinite being directed to God the Infinite, thus it would be impossible to earn salvation and redemption through the sacrifice of the finite angels, forefathers, and prophets. Those finite people would never be in a position to bring redemption or duly recompense the divine justice, and not even the Mosaic Law would do, but God the Almighty the Divine and Infinite Himself would; as we are told by St. Paul, there is nothing in this world that is infinite, “For the law was weak through the weakness of the flesh, so God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin, in order to condemn sin by means of his flesh.” (Romans 8:3). Thus He became “... the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (John 2:2).

“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son who, born of a woman, became subject to the law.” (Galatians 4:4). From the Holy Spirit and from Holy Virgin Mary⁴, whom He chose through His divine wisdom, thus the Holy Spirit filled the Holy Virgin Mary, blessed her, cleansing her from the original

sin to become worthy of carrying the Son of God in her womb. Simultaneously, and from her virtuous blood incarnated a body with a comprehending⁵ soul of the Son of God, as He opted to. Thus neither the theological divinity, nor the incarnated body of the Son of God was first in the womb of the Holy Virgin Mary, but both were there simultaneously one nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ after the union of two united natures, and one person of two united persons, without confusion, mixture, division or corruption through a supernatural mystery. And he was born from the Holy Virgin Mary, who continued to be a virgin, in nine months; thus, “... the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, a glory like that of the first born of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14). “Behold, a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which is interpreted, Our God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23), Who was “The Word was in the beginning, and that very Word was with God, and God was that Word.” (John 1:1). Thus, He took everything that we have with the exception of sin (Philippians 2: 6-8).⁶ He grew in essence and wisdom, and when He became thirty years of age was baptized from a mundane person named John, and as He was baptized the Holy Spirit

descended in the shape of a dove, and landed on His forehead, and a sound came from heaven saying: *“...This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17). Throughout His days on this earth, He was subject to blether by different sorts of people; however, through His divinity He was able to pass on the basics of the eternal merciful dogma to His virtuous disciples.

This eternal merciful dogma they needed to believe in and hand over to their followers; thus we hear Him while at the country of Caesarea Philippi, addressing them with a question saying: *“... ‘What do men say concerning me, that I am merely a son of man?’*

*They said, ‘There are some who say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, Who do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered, saying, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered, saying to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but my Father in heaven. I tell you also that you are the stone, and upon this stone I will build my church; and the doors of Sheol shall not shut upon it.’”*⁷ (Matthew 16:13-20). Therefore, on the rock of faith in the living Son of God the Church was established, thus, the foundation of Christianity is not built on anything other than

the oneness of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are no two Christs that we can build on one, and not the other; but there is only *One* Christ only, and He is the Son of the Living God, and the Son of Man [through] the Holy Virgin Mary. Therefore, Christianity can only be built on the truth of Christ in His wholeness.

Once, we heard Him talking to His disciples about the severe pains and sufferings that He will face from the heads of the Jews, how He will die, and on the third day will rise from the dead; thus we should not be surprised to see that His disciples were entirely startled when they contemplated the nature of such a news passed on to them.

They did not understand fully the depth of such news; this prompted some questions within them, as to how would He bare the pain, the suffering and the death, while He is the Only Son of God, and even whether He is God indeed? At such a time we notice how Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying far be it to you, my Lord that this should happen to you, at which time Our Lord Jesus Christ looked at him and cautioned him saying: *“...Get behind me Satan; you are a stumbling block to me; for you are not thinking of the things of God but of men.”* (Matthew 16:21-24).⁸

Yes, Peter and his companions were unaware of the meaning of the pain and the suffering of the Son of God, His death in flesh, and that death was to bestow on them and the whole world life and salvation from the incarceration of sin, death and Satan. Whereas, [and as we are told by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Philippians,] Our Lord Jesus Christ knew that “... *being found in the form of a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross.*” (Philippians 8:2). And with His death He erased the written covenant with the human kind, settled the value of the divine justice, and established peace between heaven and earth; yes, the crucifixion of the incarnated God by the Jews, who “*if they knew they would not have crucified the God of Glory.*” The incarnated God descended first into the inner parts of the earth, to salvage the spirits of those who departed in their faith in Him, released them from their captivity (Ephesians 4:8-9; Zechariah 9:11-12), and elevated them to paradise (Luke 23:43).

Further, on the third day He rose from the dead through His own divine will and strength (Matthew 16:17, 20, 21, and 22), and appeared to His disciples on several occasions, as individuals and as they were gathered. He also appeared to the women, and even entered the attic as all

the doors were locked, showing His disciples the multitude of His wounds, and ate in front of them (Luke 24:36-43). He further demonstrated to them that He was alive providing much evidence (Acts 1:3). He continued to pay them visits throughout the forty days that followed His resurrection endeavouring to explain to them what was written about Him (Acts 1:3); then He took them to the mount and as they witnessed, ascended in His manhood to the heavens (Acts 1:9), and sat on right hand side of God the Almighty (Mark 16:19 & Acts 7:56).

Further, He will come again, with great glory for the judgement (Matthew 24:29-31 and Acts 1:11).

This is in brief the Mystery of Incarnation and Redemption that was enacted by the second person of the Holy Trinity in His One Person, One Nature and One Will.

2. The Church and the Heresy

As the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit, that generated in them great strength (Acts 2:3 & 4), they travelled all over the world spreading the Good News of Our Lord Jesus Christ, baptizing all the faithful in the name of The Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit—the Holy Trinity One God—conveying to them His merciful teaching as they had received it, pure, virtuous, strong, powerful, simple and easy; this could be understood

by the simplest of people, while at the same time being difficult and complicated that even the philosophers and great scholars would not be able to dive in and find out its secrets. The aim of the disciples' teachings, both written and verbal, was to spread the right dogma in the Holy Trinity, with emphasis on spreading the Good News clearly, in the age of the complete canon. Further, those disciples would declare the belief in Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God through whom the whole world was created, who is the centre of exploration of the Holy Bible in its two testaments the old and new.

Thus, through such actions Christianity came to endear to the minds of people, and ruled over the hearts of the human kind, spreading in each and every part of the whole world; the [seeds] sown by Our Lord Jesus Christ in His great field has flourished generating a marvellous produce. However, next to this produce appeared the misleading plant that was planted by Satan in a deliberate move to fight the good. A huge number of people, who were originally Jews, and atheists came into Christianity, and brought with them their foolish idealistic misleading philosophies, and their superficial beliefs that were tied up with earthly matters leaving behind the heavenly ones. Such

people tried extensively to confuse the issue and present a mixture of their old foolish beliefs and what they received from the merciful Christian beliefs through the righteous disciples and apostles. Therefore, they were misled, spread wrong teachings, departed from the truth, and scattered around strange teachings that resulted in the troubles for the disciples and apostles. Those deceiving people exerted every effort, and employed several methods for misleading those simple faithful, misleading the minds of the shallow believers and trapping them in their wrongful teachings. However, the heads of the church were always alert, and well aware of the deceiving acts of those misleading people, unbelievers, and lying prophets; they went to battle with them, and were victorious with the supreme help and guidance of Our Lord Jesus Christ, thus alerting all the faithful to the deceitful ways they employ. This was the way that the Jews and atheists became the true enemies of the Holy Church, as they were jealous of it; but this Holy Church came out of this battle victorious, keeping the truthful, righteous and virtuous faith, defeating its wrongful enemies.

Well, the history of the Holy Church is full of several and different examples representing different eras of the Church's life

when some of these misleading people attempted to spread poison around the merciful and righteous teachings of the Holy Church. Those people were faced forcefully by our fathers and forefathers, the saints and heroes who defended the Holy Church by their own lives, exerting every effort to keep the Holy Church's faith and dogma safe and sound, defeating the repeated attempts of its enemies to confuse the straight and righteous teachings of the Holy Church. The lying prophets and the deceiving brethren were apparent and very active in the apostolic era; they were excommunicated by the righteous apostles and disciples and were thrown out of Our Lord Jesus Christ's fold.

Unfortunately the actions of those lying prophets and deceiving brethren were the idols for hundreds of other creators of heresies, the most dangerous of those emerging in the fourth century—Arius who believed that “the Son is not a God but was created by God as one of his first creatures, he is younger than God, and his strength is coming from God, therefore he is not equal to God in substance.” Arius became very active in the Roman Empire exerting every effort to spread his deceptive teachings, until it was argued and totally rejected by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in the year 325; [this Council]

composed the first part of the Christian Creed that is based on the teachings of the Holy Bible and commences with the statement, “We believe in one God...” and ends with the phrase “... and we believe in the Holy Spirit...” This Creed, in brief, conveys a message that “Our Lord Jesus Christ is One True God, and is truly the Son of the eternal God, and is equal to His Father in substance.” This Council of Nicaea excommunicated Arius.

Then the second Ecumenical Council was convened in Constantinople in the year 381, and this time the Council argued and totally rejected Macedonius' heresy in which he ignored the divine nature of the Holy Spirit and said, “The Holy Spirit is a creature that looks like the angels but has a higher rank than them.” Thus, this second council came up with the second part of the Christian Creed that states, “...we believe in the Holy Spirit, God the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and with the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified...”

3. The Oneness of the Incarnated God and the Heresy - Historically

The fifth century came carrying within its years some treacherous heresies and fruitless opinions that resulted in divisions and schisms in the body of the

Holy Church that continue to be apparent to our day. In the first four centuries, the forefathers of the Holy Church including those who participated in the two major councils of Nicaea and Constantinople, who were handed the righteous faith from the virtuous disciples and apostles, were of the belief that Our Lord Jesus Christ "is the Son of the living God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and the innate Son of God the Father [through] the Holy Virgin Mary, and in His incarnation He joined the divinity with the manhood without any division, corruption or mixture, and thus has one only nature that is composed of two natures⁹, and one will¹⁰. There are several writings in this respect; however, here we can only share with you a part of those writings, and will refer to some other parts of those writings later. That was the Universal Church's doctrine and continued to be so until the fifth century, the time of the appearance of Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who fell in an awful heresy that occupied the Holy Church for several generations to follow. Nestorius denied the two mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption. He was of the opinion that "The Holy Virgin Mary did not give birth to an incarnated God, but gave birth to a pure human, on whom divinity was bestowed when

He was baptised at the age of thirty.

Therefore, The Holy Virgin Mary should not be named as the Bearer of God (Theotokos), and Our Lord Jesus Christ has two natures and is of two persons." Further, he underestimated the fact that the three wise men kneeled and worshipped the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:11). Nestorius' heresy goes on to state that "God was not born, therefore it is not appropriate to declare that he was crucified and died, but when the time came for Him to be crucified His divinity and manhood became separated, and therefore the person who was hanged on the wooden piece was a pure human." Thus, Nestorius omitted the phrase that is repeated in the Holy Liturgy "...O You who were crucified for our sake" from all the hymns that are sung in the Holy Church.¹¹

As a result of these declarations and his heresy, the faithful erupted in a revolt against him, and denounced his heresy, demonstrating to him his diversion from the true and genuine faith. Further, several of the Holy Church's fathers and forefathers such as the Saint Cyril, Pope of Alexandria, denounced his heresy and advised him to repent and revert to the Church's yard, but he did not conform, rather, on the contrary continued to insist on his ideas. Thus, Emperor Theodosius issued a decree to convene the Ecumenical Third Council at

the city of Ephesus in the year 431. Some 200 bishops attended and participated in this Council, during which they studied, argued and denounced Nestorius' heresy, and its treacherous consequences on the Holy Church, stating that such teachings (Nestorius' heresy) are strange and do not relate in any way, form or shape to the true Christian spirit; therefore they voted to denounce and reject his heresy and excommunicate him. At the same time those present at the Council of Ephesus presented the Church's true doctrine that is derived from the Holy Bible, proving that Our Lord Jesus Christ is One Person of one nature following consolidation without confusion, mixture, division or corruption, and The Holy Virgin Mary is the Bearer of God (Theotokos)¹². Based on this Council's decision, the king [Emperor] ordered the exile of Nestorius to his monastery in Oasis of Hibis (al-khargah), in Egypt where he stayed until he departed this earthly life. However, his heresy and its impact continued to be apparent in the Church's body well after his departure from this earthly life, especially in the East.

Therefore, several of the Holy Fathers who were of an orthodox opinion, exerted every effort to defend the true faith, argued against, and thus rejected Nestorius' treacherous heresy.

Among the Holy Church fathers who were fighting Nestorius was Eutyches, the head of a monastery in the suburbs of Constantinople. While he intended to argue and reject Nestorius' heresy he got mixed up in expressing his thoughts in relation to the mystery of Incarnation; thus he came up with a more treacherous heresy that stated, "it would be impossible to have a consolidation between divinity and manhood," and became confused and mixed up in the two natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ thus mixing them together, resulting in him denying the fact that Our Lord Jesus Christ took a truthful manhood status from The Holy Virgin Mary.

Such a heresy led Eusebius, Bishop of Dorylaeum, who was one of his close friends to argue with him and advise him to reject such strange ideas, and as he was trying to convince him of his mistaken ideas that declared "the one combined and mixed nature," Eusebius too became misled by the treacherous Nestorius' heresy, thus declaring and calling for the "separation of the two natures of our Lord Jesus Christ after their consolidation." Later, he presented a complaint about Eutyches' attitude to his patriarch Phlavianus¹³ of Constantinople, and as this Patriarch was leaning towards Nestorius' teachings, he accepted Eusebius' complaint,

and decided to chair a council in Constantinople in the year 448 that was attended by 30 bishops. This Council decided to excommunicate Eutyches, made him redundant from his position as the head of the monastery, and supported Nestorius' heresy that states "Our Lord Jesus Christ has two natures and two wills following consolidation." With such an action this small Council nurtured that mistaken doctrine, which was further nurtured and enhanced through the recommendations of the Council of Chalcedon, that came to be totally rejected by the Holy Forefathers of our Church. This rejection was apparent in those Holy Fathers' writings, sayings, declarations and the Councils that followed.

When the news of this verdict reached Eutyches, he became scared and took refuge with King Theodosius, asking for his protection from the brutality of the Patriarch of Constantinople, claiming that the only thing he did was defending the true, genuine and orthodox faith. As a result the King issued a decree calling for the Council to convene again in Constantinople in April of the following year; it was attended by Phlabianus of Constantinople the King's representative and Macedonius the leader. They commenced with a review of the recommendations and decisions

of the previous small council to ensure its correctness. Although, several of those who attended this second council were present in the first, they started to blame each other for what was included in those recommendations and decisions leading to the failure of this second council.

The Second Council of Ephesus

As a result of his declaration, the public opinion shifted against Phlabianus of Constantinople due to his statement, "Our Lord Jesus Christ would have two natures following the consolidation." Thus Eutyches took advantage of the situation and submitted a complaint to Theodosius the Second, and wrote to several of the Church's fathers, amongst whom was Leo, Bishop of Rome, explaining to them the opinions of the Patriarch of Constantinople and claiming that this Patriarch exercised on him a severe measure of brutality. He begged for mediation with the Emperor to re-open his case and appealed the verdict issued by the Ecumenical Council.

Leo answered him through a letter of 1st June 449 saying, "To the dear son Eutyches the Priest from Leo the Bishop. From your correspondence we became aware that there are some people who allowed themselves, through the

ugliness of their aims to reestablish Nestorius' heresy. Please note that we are very pleased with your interest and care for such an issue, and from the contents of your letter your intentions are apparent to us, thus we have no doubt that God the Almighty who created the whole world would help you in everything. As for us, as we received the news of those misleading people, we decided with God's help to cut off such a misleading opinion. May God the Almighty bless you my dear son."¹⁴

The disagreement went beyond all expectations; thus Emperor Theodosius the Second, at Eutyches's request, wrote to all the Patriarchs and Bishops calling for another Ecumenical Council to be convened in the year 449 in Ephesus to put an end to this disagreement. When such news reached Phlavianus of Constantinople, he wrote to Leo the Bishop of Rome, Theodoret the Bishop of Korosh and others who were apparent followers of Nestorius' heresy, taking refuge in them; thus they sent representatives to the Council, Bishop Youlyanous, Priest Ranad, and Deacon Elyarnous.¹⁵

Further, in the same context the Emperor dispatched three letters to Pope Dioscorus of Alexandria, and in the third letter he gave him the authority to chair the council. From what he wrote:

"I do understand that we previously ordered Theodoret the Bishop of Korosh not to attend the council until the matter in relation to his enemies becomes clearer to us, as he dared and talked against what Cyril the righteous wrote earlier... thus, hereby we offer your holiness the authority that you become the front runner, not only in relation to Theodoret but also in whatever related to this Holy Council."¹⁶ Then the king appointed two of his assistants to be his deputies in this council and gave him instructions not to mingle with those who issued the verdict in the matter of Eutyches, as they were to be present in this council.

Thus, the Council in Ephesus was attended by some one hundred and thirty bishops from different parts of the world. The sessions of this council were held at the Church of the Holy Virgin Mary commencing the eighth day of August of the year 449.

Eutyches was invited and questioned about his belief, and he admitted and confessed in front of the council members the true, genuine and orthodox belief, and supported his verbal confession with a signed written statement that declared his full adherence to the faith as declared in the councils of Nicaea and Ephesus, and that of the orthodox forefathers and fathers, excommunicating

ny heretics, especially Mani, Valintees, Abu Lynaryous and Nestorius, even Simon the Magician having Our Lord Jesus Christ as his witness.¹⁷ Then the forefathers who participated in this council went ahead with the other sessions of this council, and repeated the Creed of the Council of Nicaea, and the teachings of the forefathers the saints in the mystery of incarnation. But these participants ignored to read the letter that was sent to the Council by Leo, the Bishop of Rome.

The Council was adjourned without any new decisions or recommendations, but this Council verified, authenticated and substantiated the decisions and recommendations taken by the previous council of Ephesus.¹⁸ This council declared full adherence with the doctrine and belief of the Old Church and following several sessions of discussions they came up with a final statement: "For the second time we specifically state that there is only one nature following the consolidation of the Incarnated Word without confusion, mixture, division or corruption."

Further, this Council decided on the demotion of those who continued to believe and declare that Our Lord Jesus Christ is of two natures, such as Phlabianus of Constantinople, Domnus of Antioch, Theodoret of Korosh,

Hiba of Edessa, Eusebius the Bishop of Dorylaeum, and as a result they were stripped of their positions and ranks. Those authentications and decisions were submitted to Emperor Theodosius who endorsed the outcome and issued a decree for the exile of Phlabianus of Constantinople.¹⁹ Then all those bishops, who participated in the council, went back to their own parishes pleased with their achievements, and assured that they have kept the true, genuine and orthodox faith, thus defeating the treacherous heresies.

It was not long when it became apparent that Eutyches did not fully repent, but once again went on spreading his wrong teachings that contradict the true orthodox faith, despite all the verbal and signed written statements submitted by him in the aforementioned Council, that led the forefathers and fathers to accept him amongst them. Therefore, the forefathers and fathers of the Councils became sure that what he declared (verbally and in writing) in the above council did not agree with his inner intentions and belief. Although the Council following Eutyches' confession issued a "not guilty" verdict, it declared his teachings as wrongful. However, the forefathers and fathers participating in the Holy Council had no other choice at that time, in the presence of his

verbal and written confession, but to declare his innocence. Further, for the record, had the council at that time issued a guilty verdict on Eutyches it would have been considered as unfair and unjust. Therefore, later as a result of his withdrawal from his earlier confessions, the forefathers and fathers looked into the matter again and demoted Eutyches and this time excommunicated him too.²⁰

When the representatives of Leo the Bishop of Rome went back to their master following the adjournment of the sessions of the Second Council of Ephesus carrying with them a copy of the council's recommendations and verdicts, he became aware of all the developments that took place. He felt humiliated and angered as it became apparent that the letter he sent was not read in the council, bearing in mind that he dreamed of becoming the head of the whole church and attaining the status of infallibility. There were also other reasons that stirred his anger, including the fact that the Council did not take his opinion that was in agreement with that of Phlabianus of Constantinople, but went further and excommunicated Phlabianus of Constantinople and all his followers considering them heretics as they believed in two natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ following the consolidation.

Therefore, Leo established a strong relationship with those who had been demoted and excommunicated as a result of the second Council of Ephesus. Those who were aware of his weaknesses thus were able to gain his trust; they also took refuge in him and accepted them in his fellowship. Further, he wrote to Emperor Theodosius begging that he be allowed to convene a council in his See to appeal the outcome of the second Council of Ephesus. The Emperor replied to him saying: "The Second Council of Ephesus had examined everything in full adherence to the faith and just requirements, thus resulting in the excommunication of those who do not deserve the priesthood, while elevating those who deserve the priesthood to their own ranks."²¹

When Leo noticed that Theodosius did not comply with his requirements, he went weeping and begging to Valentinian the Caesar of Europe to write to Theodosius on the same issue; he complied with this request. Theodosius answered him expressing the opinion that there is no need to convene another council. From what he wrote: "As for Phlabianus of Constantinople's situation we consider that he erupted a new and important issue against our dogma, and from the time the verdict was issued against him, peace and harmony has

revailed, and currently [we] enjoy the Christian truth," as stated by the historian Thawfanees.²²

As the news of Leo's acceptance of all the demoted bishops into his fellowship spread, Dioscorus of Alexandria called upon all the bishops of the See of Mark in Alexandria and issued a verdict calling for the excommunication of Leo and declared this verdict to all.

Two years passed following the Second Council of Ephesus at which time King Theodosius the Victorious departed this earthly life with no apparent heir except a sister named Pulcheria who had taken vows of celibacy and purity, and joined one of the convents, and had become a nun. Some of those receiving bishops²³ persuaded her to marry Marcian who was an army commander and at the same time a follower of Nestorius' heresy. As a result she renounced her vows, departed the convent, and got married to him, handing him the power; thus he (Marcian) became the Emperor of the East through the authority given to him by his wife Pulcheria.

Leo was pleased with the sudden change in the political arena in the East, and hurried seeking revenge on his enemy Dioscorus. Thus, he sent a delegation to Pulcheria and her husband Marcian that was composed of several of those bishops who were demoted at the second Council of Ephesus seeking that another council be

convened to appeal the outcome of the Council of Ephesus. Bearing in mind that Pulcheria was compassionate with Phlavianus, had the intention to curb the authority of Pope Dioscorus²⁴, and that her husband was a follower of Nestorius' heresy, they both opted to help Leo accomplish his wishes and called for another council to be convened to examine the outcome of the second Council of Ephesus.

Thus Marcian issued an invitation to Pope Dioscorus to attend the Council; he traveled to Constantinople to question the reasons behind convening such a council. He was advised that the main aim was to clarify the doctrine; he answered very bluntly, "the doctrine is totally complete and it does not need any further clarification. This doctrine has been issued and confirmed by the forefathers, such as Athanasios, Cyril and others. However, in case Marcian and some of the bishops wish to alter this to be more in line with the teachings of Leo and prove that there are two natures following the consolidation, he added saying that the doctrine of the church should not be added to or deleted from, and Our Lord Jesus Christ is one in nature, substance, action and will as we are taught by the forefathers. Do listen to what my Father the saint Cyril said about the consolidation between the and manhood and

how it is similar to that of fire and steel; when steel is hit by the hammer, the steel will feel the impact but the fire will not.”

Given the fact that Dioscorus had great logic and ability to explain truthfully and clearly the doctrine and belief of the church, both Pulcheria, Marcian and those demoted bishops decided that the new council was to be convened away from the capital Constantinople, and should be held in Chalcedon next to Bosphorus fearing the consequences of even discussing the issue of the doctrine and faith of Dioscorus. Therefore, they changed the aims of this new Council to discuss the issue of the demoted bishops and to recite Leo's tome.

The Council of Chalcedon

The Church of Rome had authored a book with the name [*The History of the Council of Chalcedon*]. This book described the events that took place in the second Council of Ephesus and the Council of Chalcedon. This book was translated into Arabic from Latin by Monk Francis the Latin, and was printed and published in Rome in the year 1694.²⁵ As I will be discussing this Council, I will be deriving my evidence from this book, which assisted me in proving the facts through the issues raised in this book.

This Council was held on the

8th of October of the year 451²⁶ at the church of Ophemia in the city of Chalcedon²⁷ that is named “Kadi Kawi” today opposite the city of Constantinople. The historians differ when it comes to the number of the bishops who attended the council; some said there were 330, while others were of the opinion that there came up to 630 bishops, and the most famous amongst them were Dioscorus the Pope of Alexandria, Maximus the Patriarch of Antioch, Youbeenlyanous the Bishop of Jerusalem, and Anadolyous the Patriarch of Constantinople. Further, Leo the Bishop of Rome sent three representatives and those were Bishop Baskaseenous, Bishop Loshinisyou and Priest Bonyanasyous. The judges who were selected to run the sessions of this council sat in the middle, while the bishops sat in places assigned to them. At such a time Baskaseenous one of Leo's representatives stood and said, “We have instructions from his beatitude the Bishop of Rome that Dioscorus should not be present in this council, but can only be present to defend his actions. Further, we are obliged to leave if he is not ordered to leave this council.” The judges immediately asked him what exactly did Dioscorus do that was considered to be against the canons, and he answered saying, “He can only attend to defend hat

e came up with bearing in mind that he does not have the authority on this issue, as he decided to convene a council without the authority of the Holy See." This statement was strange since even though the second council of Ephesus was held without the knowledge of the Bishop of Rome, this council continued to have the full authority as it complied fully with the conditions of Ecumenical councils that were held following a decree from the king, and the aim of convening such councils was mainly to solve church problems. Further, none of the books on the Church's history would state that any of those councils requested the authority of the Bishop of Rome, whose vote and position in any of those councils was similar to any other of the bishops present; thus his presence or absence of such a council was of no importance. The full script of the royal decree that was issued calling for the second council of Ephesus to convene was published in books authored by those opponents themselves.²⁸

And what was really puzzling, was the ignorance of the Bishop of Rome's representative about the facts, and his claim that the Bishop of Rome was not advised of the second council of Ephesus. If that was right, why did the Bishop of Rome send three representatives to this council namely: Bishop Eulalianus, Priest Ranad and

Deacon Elarous? Who were those three representing at this council? And who wrote Leo's tome, which they continued to insist should have been read?

That was what the judges noted; thus they reprimanded and silenced Baskaseenous, Bishop of Rome's representative, saying: "If you are a judge, you do not have the right to be the plaintiff."²⁹

Then, it was time for the excommunicated Eusebius, the Bishop of Dorylaeum, to present his complaint basically claiming that Pope Dioscorus was a companion of Eutyches, and that he had judged them unlawfully. At this time Dioscorus interrupted and said, "The truth is extremely apparent when you read the minutes of the second Council of Ephesus where I ensured to record everything with extreme clarity."

This was followed by a request from the judges to recite the letters received from King Theodosius and King Valentinian to Pope Dioscorus inviting him to Ephesus. Further they recited the letter addressed to him too by King Theodosius in relation to the invitation issued for the head of Mor Barsoum Syrian Monastery. Then Constantine, the Royal Palace secretary, advised that there were several other letters to several other bishops inviting them too, but the judges did not allow sufficient time for those

letters to recited, but allowed the admission of Theodoret of Korosh to the Council, as Bishop of Rome had reinstated him in his see and the king ordered his attendance at this council. Therefore, when he entered the council, the bishops of Egypt, Elerya and Palestine shouted saying, "Have mercy on us, O you people; now as for the destroyer of faith, you know the law would dictate that such a person would have to be kicked away from us." However, the judges did not pay any attention to them or to their sayings, but were obliged to act in line with the mass opinion of the deacons and Nestorians who were highly represented in this council; their huge number was much higher than that of bishops in this council. They shouted and called for the installation of Theodoret of Korosh in the council. With such a development the bishops of Egypt and their supporters addressed the judges saying: "These deacons were the first to prove this issue, and why do we see them shouting in disagreement now? This Council is not a meeting for deacons but it is merely a meeting for bishops; therefore you are obliged to cast away those who are not privileged to speak at this gathering, and whoever proved this issue would only attend and sit at the midst of this council as we have proved it after they had already proved it."

Then, and following this

interlude, the Council's secretary commenced reading the remainder of the minutes of the second Council of Ephesus. As he finished he went on to recite the letter received from the Emperor that dictated the council be convened. Dioscorus declared, "it has become apparent from whatever has been recited to you that King Theodosius did not give me the sole authority of this council but gave me the authority jointly with Youbelyanous and Tlasenyous; thus why do they refer only to me whenever they talk about the recommendations given by the Council of Ephesus? Truthfully we are all equal in our authority and whatever decisions were declared by the council were approved by all the bishops, who voted and signed to this effect. And we conveyed all this to the king who endorsed the recommendations of this Holy Council."³⁰ Some of the Eastern bishops intervened and said, "We did not approve the recommendations of the previous Council, and we did not issue a verdict on Phlabianus of Constantinople voluntarily, but we were enforced and threatened by force; thus we signed a blank document while surrounded by soldiers who were direct their weapons towards us."

The bishops of Egypt answered them saying: "The Christian would never fear anyone; the soldier of Christ would not be frightened"

the force that would frighten only the fearful. Bring on fire and let us demonstrate a lesson in martyrdom to all of you. If the martyrs were fearful people they could have never succeeded with their martyrdom."

Following this dialogue the writer went on to read the minutes of the previous council, when he came to a statement by the bishops of the East saying: "Those who would consider the renewal of the doctrine would be considered excommunicated, and whoever dares to examine the faith of the forefathers' saints could also be excommunicated; therefore keep the faith of the virtuous forefathers." At this moment the bishops of the East interrupted claiming that they did not say such a thing, and blamed the secretaries of Dioscorus for writing such a thing. This time the judges enquired who would be the writer of the copy that is being read. Dioscorus answered that each and every one of the bishops and his own writers who were writing his own copy, a statement that was confirmed immediately by Youlyanous, Thlasyous, the bishop of Korosh, and others; thus Dioscorus questioned their claim that his secretaries were the only people who wrote those minutes.

The judges here ordered the reading of the remainder of those minutes, and when the reader

reached the point where the minutes described the confession given by Eutyches to the members of the Second Council of Ephesus, and the endorsement of the bishops of his orthodoxy, including that of Baselyous, Bishop of Salocia, the latter denied his endorsement, which brought sadness to the heart of Dioscorus as he was apparently not stating the facts, and said: "I wonder what carried Baselyous to deny his speech that was recorded in the minutes despite the fact that he knows and understands that he endorsed a true teaching that was presented to us." He went on to say: "If Eutyches had denounced the truthful doctrine as detailed in his letter, and promoted a strange teaching instead, he should not only be penalized but he is worthy to be burned in fire. As for me, I will never change my mind in relation to the truthful faith of the Apostolic Universal Church. I only care for my salvation, and will keep safe the truthful doctrine and orthodox faith." Following this statement by Dioscorus, the secretary re-commenced the reading of the minutes and came to the declaration given by Baselyous of Slocia who stated: "I would excommunicate anyone who dares to segregate the One Christ, following the consolidation of his divinity and manhood, into two natures or two persons or two substances, and thus be unable

to find the one nature that is the nature of the Only Incarnated Son.” And as he was present he denied his above confession and statement.

Then the judges asked him why he excommunicated Phlabianus of Constantinople who was of that belief; he answered saying: “My judgment was a result of the judgment of some one hundred twenty of even one hundred and thirty bishops, thus I had no other choice but to obey the instructions that they laid down to me.” At this moment Dioscorus addressed him saying that with this statement he did not tell the truth in relation to the Holy Book that says: *“For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be found guilty.”* (Matthew 12:37). You have exceeded the limits of conformity and you have insulted the faith. Have not you heard what was written “do not be shy of anything, as that could destroy you?” As a result of Dioscorus’ preaching, the rest of the bishops felt the severity of their actions, and knowing that they will not be in a position to face his solid arguments and proofs, they found that it would be prudent for them to give up; thus they stood there and said: “We have sinned, and we ask for forgiveness.”

At this moment the judges addressed them saying: “Then why did you state earlier that you

were forced to write your name on a blank document when it came to the excommunication of Flabyous”? As they were faced with these facts, they had no alternative but to submit their apology again saying “We have sinned and we ask for forgiveness.” It is strange that while the Chalcedonians objected to the actions of Dioscorus in admitting Eusebius the Bishop of Dorylaeum to the second Council of Ephesus, we see them allowing Theodoret a follower of Nestorius the forbidden bishop, to attend the Council of Chalcedon, which led Pope Dioscorus to reprimand them saying: “You blame me and curse me as if I had acted against the law. I wonder whether you kept those laws when you admitted Theodoret to the council?” This time the judges replied saying “Theodoret was admitted in his capacity as a plaintiff.” Dioscorus interrupted saying, “So why he was seated at the rank of the bishops? This time they came back to him saying that both Eusebius and Theodoret were sitting in the same line and that was the line of the plaintiffs. Further, Dioscorus clarified and explained the justice of the verdict issued on Phlabianus of Constantinople saying: “It is an apparent matter that Phlabianus of Constantinople was expelled as he called for the belief in two natures following consolidation and I have proofs of the saying

the forefathers, starting with Athanasius, Gregorius, and Cyril, and it is forbidden to declare the truth in two natures following consolidation, but we can only state one nature for God, the incarnated Word.”

This time the bishops of the East interrupted and said “he (i.e. Eutychianus) claims that this is a mixing of Eutyches; Dioscorus said, we do not articulate in confusion, mixture, division or corruption.”³¹

Therefore, with such statements Dioscorus was able to reject the claims that were originally read by his enemies which claimed that he was a companion of Eutyches in faith, and proved that his confession and declaration was one nature, and this one nature was the direct conclusion of the natural consolidation. Whereas, the teachings of Eutyches called for one nature that is the result of confusion, mixture, division or corruption, the difference between those two declarations is vast,³² and if it was not for that declaration we would not have seen several of the holy church fathers refuse the outcome of the Council of Chalcedon such as Saint Timotheous the second of Alexandria, Severius of Antioch, Theodosius of Alexandria and Philoxenus of Mabbog, Boutros the Second, Ya‘qub of Sroogh, Marq of Antioch and several others communicating Eutyches the

same way they excommunicated Nestorius; their writings are the main support and proof of such a statement.³³ Thus the Holy Universal Orthodox Apostolic Church has the foundations of its teachings from those forefathers; the misleading statements of the old and new historians of the Byzantines and others, who always try to label our Holy Church with Eutyches’ heresy become apparent. In this respect the historian Mosheem said “Eutyches called on one divine nature of Our Lord Jesus Christ that was consolidated with the human nature thus forming Jesus of one divine nature. Yet, it was not clear if this was clear, unclear, sure or unsure, but this statement accompanied by the name of Eutyches was left and abandoned by those who rejected the Council of Chalcedon, led by Zenon and Boutros Al-Kassar; thus they gained the name “the ones of one nature” and not Eutychians, whereas all those named Eutychians are the ones who declared that the divine nature and the human nature consolidated thus forming one nature *only* without any confusion, mixture, division or corruption.”³⁴

The acquitting of Eutyches in the second Council of Ephesus did not denote that the council had a similar belief of his doctrine. We all know that the previous Ecumenical Councils would never

issue their verdicts on heretics without first making sure that those heretics continued to insist on their own opinions that were totally against and in contradiction with the Orthodox faith.

However, in case they were to issue their verdict on heretics, they would do that with sorrow and regret, as they wished that those heretics would repent and come back to follow the righteous doctrine and belief, so that they (as the council members) would be able to issue their verdict of acquitting them. Therefore the second council of Ephesus acted entirely in line with this general rule and acquitted Eutyches. The forefathers argued with him verbally in what he believed and thus he confessed the true faith; then he presented to the council a representation of his faith in his own hand-writing, which proved to be the truthful orthodox faith. Thus the council with its members had no other option but to issue a verdict acquitting him.

Following the above, the Chalcedonians should not have objected to Dioscorus and other fathers at the second council of Ephesus, but as they witnessed the written confession of Eutyches and the declaration that formed part of the minutes of this council, they noticed that there was nothing that indicated Eutyches' declaration contradicting with the faith of the

saintly fathers and the universal church. However, Eutyches following the adjournment of the Council changed his stand and went back to declare his original belief; thus Dioscorus and the other fathers who joined him in the council were not at fault. Furthermore a possibility could have been that Eutyches would become subject to another verdict from a follow-up council based on the fact that he denied his written declaration of the Orthodox faith and went back to his heresy. However, Leo, Bishop of Rome encouraged Eutyches prior to the latter being cleared by the forefathers in the second council of Ephesus, as he wrote him a letter "commending him on his care of the faith, and calling him the dear son the priest", as mentioned earlier.³⁵

In conclusion, and following the presentation of all these proofs it is apparent that Dioscorus was innocent and had nothing to do with all the wrong sayings and untruthful statements that were attributed to him by the Council of Chalcedon. Then the judges declared the adjournment of the first session of the council, and decided to reconvene in five days.³⁶

The Second Session

As Rome's representatives became restless and unhappy with the sound argument of Dioscorus they were sure that if the council

members continued their arguments and dialogue with him, (i.e. Dioscorus) would emerge from this council victorious. Thus, they took advantage of the presence of the judges, agreed with the Nestorians, Eastern bishops, and some other cowardly hesitant bishops to hold a secret session on the third day of the adjournment of the first session (i.e. some two days prior to the council's second session). They did not advise the judges of their agreement; neither did they invite the bishops of Egypt to this meeting. They placed guards on the door of the house where Dioscorus resided to prevent him from leaving in case he attempted to, and then they sent him an invitation to attend this illegal session. He advised their representatives that he would not be able to attend due to the presence of the guards at his door, and those guards were forbidding him from leaving; however, they sent a second and third invitation, and every time he went back to them advising them of the guards and their attitude. Finally, he recognized that the judges would not be attending this illegal session; thus he became puzzled and said, "The council had examined my situation.

What would the council need from me now?

Do they intend to relinquish and abandon what was decided in

the presence of the judges? I would never attend this session if it is not attended by the judges."³⁷

Thus, those cowardly bishops met under the pressure exerted upon them by Rome's representatives, and without establishing any argument with Dioscorus they issued their illegitimate and dishonest verdict against him. This verdict stated that the actions of Dioscorus had become apparent, that he accepted the heresy of Eutyches, which is against the law, and that he obstructed authority and did not give permission for the letter of Leo of the Church of Rome to be recited. Further, the council had invited him three times, as dictated by the Church's law, but he did not abide, and did not attend the council's session... Therefore, due to these reasons, we are authorized by Leo to remove the rank of Bishop from him and expel him from the priesthood. This council issued this verdict on Dioscorus in line with the canons and laws at hand.³⁸

They did not waste time in declaring and publishing this verdict. However, the judges of the council objected to this tyranny and requested that this verdict be quashed. Their efforts were of no avail. The verdict satisfied the needs of Pulcheria and her husband Marcian who were extremely keen to take revenge on Dioscorus.

Well, here we are today presenting to you these awful events, but let me say, the hurtful and destructive giddy actions to the pure Christian conscious. We present these events without any specific interpretation, depending entirely on the history of the Council of Chalcedon that was authored by the opponents themselves. So, what would be their verdict on the unlawful judge who issued his verdict in a secretive illegal session, held at a time contrary to the decision of the council's first session? That too by a gathering that did not represent the Ecumenical Council, but had most of its members with verdicts issued against them in previous legally held ecumenical councils for being followers of the heresy of Nestorius? This gathering was not attended by the judges, the king's representatives, and the orthodox bishops. This fraudulent verdict was issued in absentia, despite the fact that the plaintiff was near the session's meeting place. This verdict was issued based on claims and accounts that Dioscorus argued against and was acquitted from in the first legal session, when the complainants admitted saying, "we have sinned, and we ask forgiveness." Even in this illegal session, those who issued the verdict did not mention in any way that Dioscorus had swayed away from the true faith.

It is worthwhile to note here that the deviation from the true faith would allow the bishops to issue such a verdict, bearing in mind that the council with its full membership had earlier declared the innocence of Dioscorus and his council, thus and unintentionally, confessing the legality of the second council of Ephesus. This was council that demoted Domnus the Bishop of Antioch and Phlabianus the Bishop of Constantinople the Capital, who were found guilty of their admission of two natures following the natural purification and consolidation; we have noted the change in the representation in the Council of Chalcedon—Maximus was present instead of Domnus (who was alive at the time), and Anatolyous instead of Phlabianus (who was dead at the time), and we bear in mind that this Anatolyous was promoted by Dioscorus.

Well, if the actions of Dioscorus and that of the second Council of Ephesus were inappropriate, why was Domnus not reinstated on the See of Antioch? Why they did not expect Maximus and Anatolyous? Why were both promoted at the time? Their promotion should have been considered as illegal.³⁹

Following the events that took place in the first session and in the second illegal session, their treacherous aims became apparent and they, unintentionally, proved

the innocence of Dioscorus and his council (the second council of Ephesus); therefore their second verdict on Dioscorus was a failure.

Some of the histories recorded that Dioscorus wished to read the written form of the Creed of the Council of Chalcedon which was sent to him. He read this creed in front of his bishops, who correctly noticed that this Creed was full of statements that were totally against the sayings of the forefathers and the faith declared at the previous Ecumenical Holy Councils. Thus, they wrote their notes on the four margins that proved its unsuitability and inappropriateness, declaring that whoever believes in those statements could be excommunicated, and could be considered as a person who dared to change the true Holy Orthodox doctrine and belief and the laws of the Ecumenical Councils.⁴⁰

Then, following these events Marcian issued a decree for Dioscorus to be exiled to Ghanfarah in Paphlagonia of Smaller Asia [now Turkey]. Further, the Chalcedonians exerted every effort to force the righteous bishops of Egypt to sign Leo's letter, and the declaration of their council, and they decided that they will not diverge an inch away from the true faith that they represented their own lives in defense.

Thus, I reject the Council of Chalcedon, as it changed the true

faith, and supported Nestorius' heresy that spoke of the two natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ following the consolidation, dividing the *one* savior in two, and separating the one universal church, scattering its children instead of combining and uniting them. Thus commenced the divisions and disentanglement between the parties, and the church continues until these days to suffer as a result of this awful division.

As a result, great persecution erupted against those who rejected the Council of Chalcedon. Even Eutychius who forcefully overtook the See of Alexandria with the help of Byzantine soldiers persecuted and killed twenty four thousand of those who followed coherently the forefathers' faith, mostly bishops, priests and monks.⁴¹ Further, the remainder of the orthodox bishops were expelled from their parishes and Sees, and installed instead were those strangers. Thus, the Roman Empire exerted every effort to exile, persecute and discriminate against those who rejected the Council of Chalcedon in order to validate its recommendations,⁴² but all these efforts were of no avail, as the true orthodox faith was so strong in the hearts of those great heroes who were not frightened of the Romans' supremacy and military strength as witnessed by the historians from among the opponents themselves.⁴³ Further, they disregarded the difficulties that they faced and

were not worried about exile and expulsion. Among those who faced such a situation was the Syrian Patriarch of Antioch, Boutros the Second (nicknamed Al-Kassar), the saint Barsoum the hermit and the head of the Monasteries of the East, Philoxenus of Mabbog, Severius of Antioch and several more. Thereafter the Church held several other councils in which it excommunicated the declaration of the council of Chalcedon and the tome of Leo. Among these councils it is worthwhile to cite the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople that was held in the year 476 following a decree from Emperor Basyleskous and was attended by Mor Boutros the Second, Patriarch of Antioch, the Saint Timothawous the second Patriarch of Alexandria, and some five hundred bishops.

This was followed by a decree that was issued by Basyleskous against the council of Chalcedon and the tome of Leo, confirming and restating the doctrine of one nature in Our Lord Jesus Christ following the consolidation⁴⁴ that was signed by some seven hundred bishops.⁴⁵

Further, in the year 482 yet another council was held in Constantinople by an order of Emperor Zenon. This order was accepted by Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, and was also signed by the

representatives of the Bishop of Rome and endorsed by King Zenon under the name (Hantokyoun⁴⁶ which means the union bull that was written at the request of Akakios the Patriarch of Constantinople and addressed to the bishops and faithful in Alexandria, Libya and the five cities. In this bull it was stated, that we totally reject any research, or any attempt to specify in any way shape or form any other belief that is beyond the truthful decision taken by the 318 forefathers, and consider such attempts as strange to us, as this original belief and doctrine is complete, orthodox and was supported by the one hundred fifty forefathers in Constantinople, and was followed by our saint fathers who met saint Cyril, exiled the heretic Nestorius, and accepted the twelve chapters that were written by Beatitude Cyril. Further, we excommunicated Nestorius, the imaginative Eutyches, and whoever thought of any other doctrine or belief that is beyond our true faith that was mentioned earlier. Moreover, we confess of one God, who is of one nature, our God and Saviour Our Lord Jesus Christ who is equal to us in His manhood, who descended and incarnated from the Holy Spirit, and from Our Lady the Holy Virgin Mary is the Son of God. As for those who try to divide Him into two, or think of him as a mixture or a combination.,

we will not accept them among us, whereas He Who was born of the Virgin Mary had not added another Son, but was confirmed in the Trinity, and the Trinity itself had become confirmed as the Word of God became One of the Trinity in flesh.⁴⁷

From the above it is concluded that the faith in two natures as decided by the Council of Chalcedon is something out of the ordinary when it comes to the Church's teachings and had become a part of the church in a very peculiar way. Thus, it was fought by the faithful fathers, yet it was accepted forcefully by some of the cowardly bishops when hatred had its opportunity.

Our guide to such a statement is that the aforementioned Hantokyoun of Zenon was not only accepted by those churches in Antioch and Alexandria but also by the church of Constantinople. And this document does not confess the faith of the first three Ecumenical Councils and the twelve chapters of Cyril that supports the one nature of God the Incarnated Word.

However, if we intend to go on tracing the historic events that followed this period of time, and the developments of the argument on one and two natures or one or two wills, we will need a long time. But, Hereclus in the seventh century suggested that the research

on the doctrine of one nature and two natures be left alone, and the doctrine of the belief in one nature in the Incarnated Word should be circulated and accepted by all. This statement was welcomed by several of the bishops amongst them Enoryous Bishop of Rome who, and as a result of this sent to Sergious Patriarch of Constantinople saying, "as for will I confess in one will in Jesus⁴⁸, thus the confession of one will would directly defeat any teachings of two natures." Thus, what we have mentioned in this brief time, in this speech, is sufficient to convince the smart researcher that the belief in one nature of God the Incarnated Word is the universal belief of the universal church since its establishment.

4. **The Oneness of the Incarnated God and the Fathers of the Church** As mentioned earlier the forefathers of the Church in the different generations believed in one nature of God the Incarnated Word and in this regard had left for us a vast amount of solid research, obvious interpretations, and truthful confessions. We now have the opportunity to only mention some of those:

1. In his book, "Faith and the True God who is without body became apparent in body being whole in true and full divinity," Saint Gregorious the Miraculous (270+) stated that He is *not* two

persons, and does not have two natures, and we do state that we believe in a quadrant, God, The Son of God, The Human, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

2. At the time when the forefathers composed the known Nicaean Creed they referred to all the eternal and the earthly issues and the high and the humble deeds combined that happened through the *One* and that is Our Lord Jesus Christ. In this respect they said: "True God from the True God... Descended from heaven and incarnated... crucified... suffered, died, buried and resurrected... and ascended to heaven."

3. In his letter to King Youbyanous, Saint Athanasious the Apostle (+373) said, "we should believe in one nature, one person of God the Perfect Incarnated Word, and whoever does not believe in this would be in divergence with God and would create a rift between Him and the saintly fathers." Further, in his article on Incarnation, he said, "The Godhood and the Manhood combined in one nature, and that is the God and human simultaneously with one action, and one nature for God the Word that had incarnated."

4. In the fourth century, Julius the Bishop of Rome wrote in his letter to Dionosious the Bishop of Cyprus saying, "Those who do not confess that God who

descended from heaven became incarnated of a Virgin, and He is one in His body will be counted amongst the deceivers and the fraudulent, who would state that the news they received is that He is of two natures. Therefore, those who speak of two natures should not worship the two but the one nature.⁵⁰ Further, in one of his letters, and on the topic, '*Equal in Substance*,' he said, "In the divine book we did not find any difference between the Word and His body, but both are one nature, one person, one action and all one *God one Human*." He added, "If the act happened by one thus the action would be one, I mean, with this the act of the actor."⁵¹

5. The Sun and the Prophet of the Syrians, St. Ephraim (+373), in an elegy on the Friday of Passion said: "They presented a stick to humiliate the great Creator; they nailed the hand that measured the heavens. For God in His Christ had salvaged the creation that He created. The sons of Adam nailed those hands that originally created Adam, yet God stood there in the court room and was slapped on His face by the hands of a slave. We cannot bear to hear a tiny word, while God is hanged on the cross, and the creation is mourning. We drank the wine and committed the greatest sin."

6. In his interpretation of the verse, "God created me," St.

Baselious says: We say that the *One Son* is two, and we do not say that "*Priesthood*" is one by itself, neither the "*Manhood*" is one by itself; but we say one nature, one person, just as St. Peter did not say two natures, but confessed saying: "Jesus suffered for us in flesh, and in relation to His birth in flesh the angels spread the good news to the shepherds saying: "Today a saviour was born who is Jesus God." ⁵²

7. Saint Gregoreous Althe'ologous says, "He is one person, one nature worshiped by the Wise men, whereas the oneness of God the Word should not be considered by counting how many natures, or persons, but the fact that He was born of a virgin who kept her virginity throughout without any change... He is One Son, thus there are no two natures of Jesus following consolidation, and he is not a separation or a mixture of what resulted from two sides, because the nature of the priesthood and the nature of the manhood combined into oneness."

8. In the third article of his interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians St. John the Chrysostom says: "I would declare here that God the Word took the whole human from our nature and he is complete in everything. He has his own person, and with this I mean the *Word*, and for this we say He is one nature, the Word that becomes flesh."

9. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "We confess that the Son of God is God in Spirit, and the Son of human in flesh, thus there are *no* two natures of this One Son, one to be worshiped while the other would not be worshiped, but we worship the Word the Incarnated God of one nature." Further, in his correspondence with King Theodosius says: "We would not unclithe the manhood of the priesthood, and would not unclithe the Word of the manhood following that mysterious consolidation that is difficult to interpret, but we confess that the one Jesus is composed of two combined that are one formed of two, without any destruction to any of those two natures, without any mixture, but through pure and honorable consolidation in purpose." Moreover, he says:

"The two natures are combined, and the Word became human, and incarnated. Thus we say this consolidation is natural in order to defeat the untruthful statements that aim at separating us from the union with God the Almighty through holiness and virtuousness "i.e. partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).⁵³ Moreover, and in his letter to Sophokyouos we read, "If we contemplate the trend that does not impair saying: "Prior to the consolidation the natures were two, however following the

consolidation these natures would not be separated; thus we cannot refer to two sons, but we do not segregate that which is not subject to any segregation, but say the One Son as our fathers said, and the substance of God is the One Incarnated Word.”⁵⁴ In addition to all the above, and in the same context, and in chapter five of his twelve chapters says: “whoever dares and says that Jesus is human, and God descended in him, and would not say that He is True God, One Son in nature as the Word became flesh (John 1:14), and shared with us the flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:12) should be excommunicated.”⁵⁵

5. The Oneness of the Incarnated God

Theologically The Churches of the Syrian Orthodox of Antioch, the Alexandrian Coptic, the Armenian and the Ethiopian believe in one nature, one person, one will, and one action of the eternal God the incarnated without any mixture, division or corruption.

As for the Roman Catholic, Greek and Protestant churches, they believe that Our Lord Jesus Christ and following the consolidation of natural truthful substance is of two natures, one which is divine that acts of what is unique to the priesthood, while the other is human which acts of

what is unique to the manhood.

Thus, while our Church confesses the consolidation of the two natures in aphorism and action, the other churches call for the segregation of those two natures, even if they intend to consolidate them in a linguistic way, thus differentiating between Jesus *God* and Jesus human, as it refers some actions to the priesthood, while other actions to the manhood, as it is evident in Leo of Rome’s saying in his letter, “Truly, Jesus the two Gods—the one human brilliantly conveys miracles while the other is a recipient of humiliation.” While our Church states that whatever relates to priesthood and whatever relates to the manhood are referred to equally in the Incarnated Word without any discrimination. This opinion is based on brilliant arguments, solid proofs, if those proofs are logical, historical and even the testimony of the opponents themselves.

Well, in order to shed some light on such a complicated matter, it is prudent that we understand what *Nature* is, what *Person* is, and what is meant by the natural person consolidation.

The philosophers had defined *Nature* saying: The word *Nature* describes the truthful or essential characteristics by which something is recognized (its truth and its essence). As in our saying, “*The Nature of God*,” this means

God himself. As for 'Person' this describes that this thing itself had acted, or in other words, the 'Person' is a spiritual essence of a nature that is able to participate with others, while its purpose is to stand alone away from consolidation with others.⁵⁶ The 'Person' allows for individuals to be distinguished between each other; thus we can distinguish Peter from Paul, and Paul from John.

'Person' is a more general term than individual or someone or being. We Syrians recognize 'Person' as being the specialized essence, or the specialized nature, which can refer to the Creator and the created together. As for 'Individual,' it relates to the created; thus when 'Self' is specialized it becomes 'Person' whether that was in relation to the Creator or any other being. However, if the description is stated thus this is a 'Person.'⁵⁷ In this context, in his Encyclopedia [*Mnorath Qudshe*], Mor Gregorious Bar 'Ebroyo says: We clergy understand that each essence is a nature and each nature is an essence. A nature, in our comprehension, is not established on conditions, rather conditions are established in a nature; while according to these outsiders each essence is a nature, but not each nature is an essence. The same conditions that prevail in an essence, as the outsiders see it, is different from each other.

Nature, either proper or general, as understood by us and those outsiders, thus the proper nature is *Person*, and based on this fact nature could not exist if it does not have a *Person* in reality, but in creation only. As for the many *Persons* it is not impossible to have several of those combined in a general nature.⁵⁸

Further, Bishop Isidoros says: "Nature, when compared to intellectual or physical creatures can be considered either in its exclusive or general way. If it is considered in its general way it will cover each and every kind of its physical creatures, such as Peter, Paul, John who are considered of the human kind, horse, beast of prey, donkey, cat of the animal kind, while Michael, Gabrielle are from the spirit kind. However, if it is considered in its exclusive way it will take into account the *Person* or *Individual* from the kind such as Peter only from the human kind, horse only from the animal kind and Michael only from the spirit kind.

An anonymous [person] stated, "where there is an essence there is exclusiveness and generalization. Thus exclusiveness would be an essence thus the *Person* is one. But in case of generalization there will be too many *Persons*." He went further saying: "The substance, or nature or essence in specific is the *Person*, thus it is

impossible to have a substance, or nature of essence without *Person* in action with the exception of mind.”⁵⁹

What is the Meaning of Consolidation?

Consolidation in general is the result of two or more things that are grouped into one thing. However, in theology, consolidation—union without confusion, mixture, division or corruption, which is in the substance, is not subject to change, confusion or corruption. It is in a way similar to the union between the soul and the body without any confusion, mixture, division or corruption. It would also be similar to the union between fire and steel, and electricity and wire.

Each, the soul and the body keep whatever is specific to each of them in this union, whereas if the soul is changed into the body, it would have been robbed of the ability to speak or think and any other unique actions that it is known of, thus became similar to the animals, would have been perished with death, and could have been transformed into sand. Further, in case that the body in this union is transformed into the soul, this body would not have needed the food or drink. Therefore, each (the body and the soul) would keep what is specific and unique to each of them despite this union.

That kind soul, when it approaches its union with that heavy body it affects this body, but it does not get affected by this body, whereas with this union the soul would deliver to the body whatever it has of life and honor thus differentiating this body from animals' body through intellectual abilities.

Therefore, the human being is composed of two substances, one is earthly and the other one is heavenly, and in this specialized union they transformed into one; thus no matter what happens to a part of this one united presence that is composed of the union of two it will affect the whole human being. It is a fact that some actions would only happen with the soul, while others would happen for the body or any part of this body. But, as far as both are united and the human being is one that is composed of different parts that are combined naturally, whatever happens to the parts would be directed and referred to the whole. As we say, John ate, drank or slept, or we say Salem is an engineer, lawyer, dead or alive.

Saint Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria says, “we have taken a perfect example of the union between the fire and steel to try and simplify this union between the manhood and the priesthood. Even if both are different in nature,

they became of one nature as they become united, the same as it is the case with fire and steel, whereas with such union neither the steel is transformed into fire, nor the fire would be transformed into steel... whereas when the steel is hit by the instrument with the fire, the fire is hitting the steel that is suffering, while the fire does not suffer.⁶⁰

Saint Cyril goes on saying, and this time in his letter to Duteekos, Bishop of Caesarea (we have to take example out of our nature we human being, as we are created of a soul and body, and both have different natures prior to the union, and with the union both formed one human with one nature. Thus the soul did not change its nature when it became united with the body, and it did not become the body, and the body did not become the soul, but the soul and body became one nature, thus one person.”⁶¹ Thus, we understand the union of the priesthood and the manhood in *One* Jesus, and that is what the Holy Book in its divine script aimed at. This is what the virtuous fathers meant in their statements, and that is what the uncorrupted mind would believe in.

Thus, we should not address as two, the two natures that have been united, as following the union between the priesthood and the manhood those become *One* and not two. In the same token,

regarding the union between soul and body in the human being, we do not refer to this union as an intellectual and animal, but we say an intellectual animal.

Further, we could not see an easier example to the human mind than this example, the union between the sweetness of the *Word* with the greatness of the *Manhood*. Thus, following the union we would not say a human and God, neither would we say a God and a human, but we say the *Human God*, and the *God Human*, and as it is apparent in the words of the scripture, ‘*God the Incarnated Word*’.

6. The Oneness of the Incarnated God and the Holy Bible

From the above we came to understand that the followers of the Council of Chalcedon, while they confess the union of the two natures, the Priesthood, and Manhood, of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in expression, they call for the division of those two in reality. This belief explains what was written in that Leo’s famous tome that states “truly, Christ the two “God and Man” would come, whereas the first would surprise all with the miracles conveyed, while the second would be subject to humiliation.” This belief and conviction is well away from the spirit of the Holy Bible.

The Holy Divine Book did

not differentiate between the two natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and His person, and its divine contents clearly demonstrate the *One* nature of the *Incarnated God*, whereas all actions (both majestic and humble) are referred to Him. Further, in several instances, the divine content would refer the eternal actions to the earthly and the earthly actions to the divine without any distinction between the actions. The reason behind this is that whatever is done by Jesus Christ is referred to *One* God, who is the *God the Incarnated Word*.

1. John the Theologian says in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “*I am the first and the last; I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.*” (Matthew 1:17-18). The speaker here is the eternal priesthood, while at the same time He says (I was dead), but the event; the death of the Incarnated Word did not happen in priesthood, but in manhood. However, the expression (I) at the beginning of the verse and towards the end of the verse is a solid proof that there is only *One* nature of the Incarnated Word, and that what was behind referring both death and life to *Him*. We should not be surprised; whereas the Holy Bible refers death to the soul, due to its union with body, bear in mind that the soul is eternal, and the death should only be referred to the body. In the Old Testament, we read,

“*Then you shall select for yourselves cities to be cities of refuge for you that the person who kills someone unaware may flee there.*” (Numbers 35:11), and in the same token the author of Proverbs says: “*And they lie in wait, they hide themselves to shed blood.*” (Proverbs 1:18).

Thus, we would not diverge from the spirit’s way, and the strength of the Holy Scriptures when we say *God* suffered, crucified and died, because both the priesthood and manhood and following their natural substance union became *One*.

2. Our Lord Jesus Christ says: “*... before Abraham was born, I was.*” (John 8:58), thus who was before Abraham was *His* priesthood and not in *His* manhood, whereas eternity is a description of manhood. While, we need to consider here that the speaker is the manhood who has an end, but what He talks about demonstrates eternity which is a description of manhood. Further, in this verse He did not say Priesthood was, but said “*I Was*”. With the expression (I) is a solid proof of the *One* nature of the Incarnated Word, whereas (I) would never ever refer to two.

3. St. Paul says: “*... for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.*” Who was apparent on the cross was the Son of Man – *Manhood* – but the

verse here states the crucified is the *Word of Glory*. This naming would never be given to a simple human; the *Lord of Glory* is a True God. Further, the verse is very specific in expressing that the Lord of Glory who is *One* in His nature is the same who was crucified by the Jews. Thus, in case they crucified a mere human, curse would not have followed their whole generations; they could have continued to be living with our original sin, and the aim of the Incarnation of the Word God would not have been achieved.

That which aimed at the salvation of the humans from the slavery of death, evil and sin. Thus, it would be incomprehensible to have that manhood, no matter how virtuous this manhood is, erase that severe first sin of the human kind, if this manhood was not united with the priesthood, which bestowed on the manhood that great value which equates to the importance of redemption and the payment of the divine judgment. Thus, through the participation of the priesthood with the manhood in suffering, crucifixion and death, the substance of the priesthood was not affected. In the same context the human being is a union between the soul and the body and in some instances sorrow might have its impact on the soul; thus the body might be affected and as a result become ill.

Further, on some other occasions some pain and suffering might affect the body of the human being, such as the amputation of one of the limbs; thus the soul would participate with the body in the suffering. In both cases nothing would depart the soul's substance, despite the missing limb of the body. Thus, in this context we can explain how the priesthood participated with the manhood in the suffering without losing anything from the substance of the priesthood. This in itself is what the saint fathers, church scholars of the first century understood, as it is apparent in the Syriac poem on faith written by Mor Ishaq of Antioch that says: "it is the pride of the church that *God* died on the cross.

4. St. Paul also says: "*For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*" (Romans 5:10).

Well, is not the Son of God also God? Then how come the Son of God dies? Thus, St. Paul, and in this verse, did not differentiate between the Priesthood and Manhood, as he says: "... God has reconciled us with the death of His Son" which means the death of the manhood for our sake. This is an evidence of the existence of one nature, one action of the Incarnated Word.

5. St. John says: "*For God so loved the world that he even gave his only begotten Son.*" (John 3:16). This verse is of no difference to the previous verse; it demonstrates the Love of God to the world, even to sacrifice His Son. Further, it cannot be stated here that the sacrificed was only the manhood, but what is meant with in the context of this verse is simple, the *Only Son of God*. Thus, it is imprudent to state here that the sacrificed is only the priesthood of the Son, bearing in mind that the sacrifice had impacted the manhood. Therefore, the logical conclusion of this argument would be that the Son the Incarnated Word is one nature one person.

6. St. Paul also says: "*Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood.*" (Acts 20:28). Well, does St. Paul here mean the blood of God? God is a spirit, and the spirit neither has flesh nor blood. Thus, was the mystery of salvation completed with merely the blood of manhood? Thus, what is its importance to the world? And why would this verse refer to the blood of God? The logical conclusion in reply to all these questions would be that the mystery of salvation was completed by the Son the Incarnated Word; referring the

description of one nature to the other, as it is apparent in this verse is a solid and unyielding proof of the statement '*One Nature*' and the action of this statement.

7. St. John says about Our Lord Jesus Christ: "*No man has ascended to heaven except him who came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven.*" (John 3:13). The description, '*The Son of Man*' refers to the Incarnated Son following the incarnation. Here Saint John refers to the ascension to Him and descent from heaven to Him, and both actions were undertaken by the priesthood that descended from heaven; what descended from heaven is the priesthood, and not the manhood as the latter was begotten from Virgin Mary. Therefore, the saint was right in referring both to the ascension to and descent from heaven to the Son of Man as the union between the Person the Eternal Word with the earthly body becoming *One*, and that this *One* is treated in the third person singular in the context of the above verse is in itself a solid proof of what we have been arguing all along.

8. St. Paul says: "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.*" This verse is also similar to those already mentioned so far, whereas the word '*Jesus*' is the name that the Word took when incarnated, the verse here describes Jesus as "for ever" which is one of

e descriptions of the manhood. Further, the word 'same' is included in this verse to reassert the proof that there is only one nature one person God the Incarnated Word.

9. St. Paul says: "... *The first-born of God, [the only Son] who is in the bosom of his Father, He has declared Him.*" (John 1:18).

Thus, the Only son had declared the news to the visible man, the news that became apparent to and heard by the saint. In this verse He says "who" which means He is in the bosom of the Father. This Only Son is one in substance, thus if He is one in the scripture and one in the mind He is one in substance.

And He is One Son, He is One person of One nature. Further, having referred to Him twice in this verse is in itself a solid proof that He is of one nature.

10. At the time when the Incarnated Word baptized at the hands of John the Baptist in the River Jordan, the Divine Voice from heaven addressed Him directly saying: "... *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased.*" (Matthew 3:17).

Well, did God mean in this saying His son in manhood only?

As the manhood was being baptized at the time, and this manhood by himself can never be considered a natural Son of God the Father. In the same context, it

is impossible to say here that what was meant with the word *Son* was the priesthood *Son*, as the divine words came at the time Our Lord Jesus Christ was in the water, and the dove descended on His forehead... therefore, what is meant here is the *Son* the Incarnated Word of one consolidated nature.

11. St. Paul says: "*We see that he is Jesus, who humbled himself to become a little lower than the angels through his suffering and his death, but now he is crowned with glory and honor; for he tasted death for the sake of every one but God. And it was meet and proper for him, in whose hand is everything and for whom are all things, to bring many sons to glory, so that from the very beginning of their salvation they are made perfect through sufferings.*"

(Hebrews 2:9 and 10).⁶²

Thus the apostle when he states, 'Jesus' that is followed by 'himself' in his grace tasted death, he did not differentiate between his priesthood and manhood, and thus supports the fact that Jesus Christ is of one nature one person. This statement is supported by the saints and fathers, such as St. Ephraim (+373) who says in the elegy of Good Friday, "They presented a stick to humiliate the great Creator; they nailed the hand that measured the heavens.

For God in His Christ had salvaged the creation that He created. The sons of Adam nailed

those hands that originally created Adam, yet God stood there in the court room and was slapped on His face by the hands of a slave. We cannot bear to hear a tiny word, while God is hanged on the cross, and the creation is mourning.” Further, in his twelve chapters, St. Cyril says “that who does not confess that the Word of God suffered in flesh, tasted death in flesh, and became the firstdead to be alive who creates life, should be excommunicated.”

In addition to the above verses, there are several other verses that discuss this same topic: Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 4:8-10, Timothy 3:16, Philippians 2:6-8, Hebrews 1:31, 1 Corinthians 10:4, 1 Corinthians 10:9, Luke 1:44, Colossians 2:9, Timothy 2:13, and John 10:38.

Going through the above divine verses it becomes apparent that there is a union between the Divine Word of God and the Incarnated body by the Holy Spirit from the Holy Virgin Mary, this union is natural, pure and beyond any multiplication or division. In addition to the supernatural birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ which in itself is solid proof of the union of priesthood and manhood, the fact that the virginity of the Holy Virgin Mary continued even after the birth, thus the prophecy of Ezekiel about Holy Virgin Mary

was fulfilled “... *This gate shall shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it because the Lord, the God of Israel, will enter in by it; therefore shall it be shut.*” (Ezekiel 44:2).

If birth is considered of only the birth of manhood – as the claim – thus the virginity of Holy Virgin Mary should have ceased with the birth, but as it is evident that the virginity of Holy Virgin Mary continued after the birth in the same status as it was before the birth; in this statement itself there is a solid proof that the union of priesthood and manhood had happened. One of our fathers asked those who believe in two natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ, “Did the Holy Virgin Mary give birth to a God or a Man. If you say she gave birth to a God you are misled as God is not born, and if you say a Man she was the mother of Man and not the mother of God, thus you are denying Him in nature. Further, if you answer this question by saying she gave birth to a God and Man, making her the mother of God and Man she would thus have two Sons, one God and the other Man, and such a statement lacks logic and it is totally fraudulent. Therefore the proper statement describing such an event would be God and Man became *One*, thus the Holy Virgin Mary gave birth to *One*. The *One* that was born from the Holy

gin Mary is not totally God, not totally human, nor He is God and man, *But He is Incarnated God*, and this is the whole truth.⁶³

The Oneness of the Incarnated God and the Opponents of the Church

1. In the *History of Division of Monemous Masarah of the Greek Orthodox [Church]*, p. 193, we read, "Apparently the teachers of the west were in agreement with those of Alexandria in the method of expression as it is apparent from the letters of Julius the Pope of Rome to Dionosious the Bishop of Cyprus in the midst of the fourth century, although he failed to confess the two natures, and he based his denial on the sayings of the Holy Bible, 'The *Word* become flesh' and the saying of St. Paul, 'One God Our Lord Jesus Christ'. Further, he confessed in one nature of priesthood who did not suffer and the manhood that suffered."

2. In the book, *The true Faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ*, that was authored by one of the Roman Catholic Bishops, and was translated to Arabic and printed first in Rome, then in Beirut in the year 1864, pp. 92-93, he said, the Roman Church believes and teaches that there are two natures of Jesus, then declares excommunication on anyone who does not believe in *One* nature of Jesus. In the same context this was

written following the Council of Lataria that was held as ordered by St. Martino the Pope in the year 649 in the fifth canon as follows: "that whoever does not believe in the opinion of the holy fathers that truly there is *One* nature of God the Word in Jesus, is a proof that Jesus took our substance completely with the exception of sin should be excommunicated."

3. In the book, "The Summary of the Theological Articles" by Beiruni JR, (translated by Fr. Yousef Al-Dibis) vol. 3, p. 171, in a comment on the sayings of the fathers he states: "*One* nature of the Incarnated Word" that was written as "What I want is that they know the *One* incarnated nature has become *One* following union, and I confess to that. But if they state the same for the nature I would deny that." Further, on p. 183 of the same book we read what supports the saying, "one action of Our Lord Jesus Christ" as he says: "I confess that Jesus became apparent as *One*, or it can be stated *One* combined action following the supernatural union between the two natures and their ability to commit *One* action."

4. In the book, *The Teaching Principles in Traditional Theology*, of the Protestants, vol. 2, p. 199, we read what totally agrees with our merciful doctrine and belief. It reads: "The actions of Jesus, some are totally divine such as miracles,

while others are total human, such as drinking, eating and sleeping, and others are both divine and human and those actions that need both the priesthood and manhood natures to participate as it happened in the mystery of redemption. It is clear that all those actions are the actions of one person, and the actions of Jesus are the actions of a divine Person, even if those actions are a characteristic of humans.

Therefore, it is allowed to consider the obedience and suffering of Jesus, even if that obedience and suffering is of the divine nature, that it is the obedience and suffering of the divine *Person*. Thus, the *Person's* soul could never be injured or burned, but when the body suffers, we would state that the whole human suffered. Based on this principle, we say, that the obedience of Jesus is the righteousness of God, and the blood of Jesus is a divine blood, thus it is concluded that the eternal settlement took place.

Further, it might happen that the name *Christ* might be given when talking about an action that was done by one nature, and this action was a specialty of another nature. For instance, when we talk about Him delivering Himself to death, here we refer to God, the Son of God, and the God of Glory, and also we refer to Man, the Son

of Man, and whatever actions that were referred to Him that are of divine nature. From those saying the Son of Man who forgives the sins, the God of Sabbath, raises the dead, sends the angels to pick up His elect.

5. The Catholic Archimandrite Vladimir Guette, in the fifth volume of his book, *The Church History*, about the Council of Chalcedon that decided the doctrine of the two natures says: "The recommendation and decision of the Council of Chalcedon includes expressions that are beyond the Nestorian heresy, whose ghost frightened and continues to frighten the apparent to all." The author declares here saying: "A number of bishops who abstained from confessing the legitimacy of the Council of Chalcedon should really be excused, whereas the recommendations and decisions of this council especially those in relation to the doctrine and beliefs included expressions that might even damage the Nestorius' heresy." (Guett T., 5, p. 46). Moreover, he says: "Leo Bishop of Rome was led by his jealousy for his crusade the jealousy that he led everyone to believe is his zealousness for religion." (vol. 5, p. 21).⁶⁴

Thus, from the above testimonies that were derived from the opponents themselves, we comprehend, and others who

...ve a living conscience should comprehend and understand with us, that our Holy Church did not diverge an inch from its orthodox faith that was delivered to it from the virtuous apostles and the holy fathers, but continued to safe-keep this doctrine and belief without any change. It paid dearly to safe-keep this doctrine that calls for *One Nature of God the Incarnated Word*, producing even thousands of martyrs, [whose names are] written in the white pages of history of this fruitful struggle, and receiving the victorious crown through the strength of itsaviour Our Lord Jesus Christ who promised that He will be with us for eternity; the doors of hell could never prevail against it.

Conclusion

The above was what I wished to talk to you about in your esteemed conference, in reply to the invitation received from the members of this conference. I pray to God to support us for His glory, for the spread of His divine kingdom, and for the gathering of all the scattered sheep in one yard, thus confirming the Holy Church on the rock of the orthodox faith.

O Christ please listen to us.
Amen.

1. The translator, Theodora Issa, acknowledges the assistance of V. Rev. Fr. Boutros Touma Issa, Afodyakno Touma Issa, and

Afodyakno Theodore Issa for their insightful comments and immense help, as well as the support of Bathqyomo Marine Khoury- Issa, and sisters Tomayess and Tamara. Further, thanks are extended to Dr. Thomas Joseph and Dr. Matti Moosa.

2. 'Yowakheem' in the Arabic text. (tr.)

3. d. 1980. (tr.)

4. *Bthulto Qadishto Maryam, Yoldath Aloho*. (tr.)

5. The author here specifies that this soul thinks and speaks. (tr.)

6. This statement was derived from the meaning of those verses from St. Peter's Epistle to the Philippians. Also please refer to St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews 4:15. (tr.)

7. These are the verses 19 and 20 that were not included in the original version of this lecture, but there was a reference to those two verses I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then he charged his disciples not to tell any man that he was the Christ.

8. This whole paragraph was derived from the verses 21- 24 from Matthew chapter 16; only a part of verse 24 was recorded word

by word by the author. (tr.)

9. *Al-Khareedah Al-Nafeesah* Vol. 1, pp. 462-482, on Julius the Roman's tome to Dionysious, Bishop of Cyprus and *Nahj Waseem* of Bishop Jirjes Shahin the Catholic, p. 20, and the *History of the Division of Gorgeous Masarah* vol. 1, p. 191 and p. 192 and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 1, pp. 306-307.

10. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 1, p. 307. The Speech of the Crostomos in the sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ ("Not as I wish but as you wish." Matthew 26:39).

11. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, p. 36.

12. Mother of God.

13. Flavian (tr.)

14. *The Chalcedon Council Book*, in Arabic, (Rome, 1694) (34:41).

15. *Ibid* (14:43 and 43).

16. *The History of Chalcedon Council* (18:89).

17. *The History of the Second Council of Ephesus* (Syriac), and the *History of the Church* by Bar 'Ebroyo (Demnos Translation), and the *History of Mor Michael Rabo*, p. 180, and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 123-135.

18. *The History of Mor Michael Rabo*, p. 180.

19. *The History of the Council of Chalcedon*, 15:45, and 16:62. *The History of the Second Council of Ephesus* (Syriac), and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 1, pp. 119-147.

20. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 133-137 and 309-313.

21. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 148-150.

22. *The History of Division of Jaraseemous Masarah*, 1:225.

23. *The History of Nations in a Brief*, Bar Ebroyo, 2nd Edition, p. 85.

24. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, p. 150 and the *History of the Coptic Nation and its Church*, Madam Butcher, vol. 2, p. 51.

25. Please refer to *Al-Khareedah Al-Nafeesah*, vol. 1, p. 497.

26. Lumon the Jesuit, vol. 1, p. 258; *The History of Syria* Madbas, vol. 4, p. 104; *The History of Division*, vol.

1, p. 266, and *The History of the Syrian Church*, vol. 2, p. 154.

27. Bar 'Ebroyo on the Council of Chalcedon in the translation of Maximus, and the *History of Mor Michael Rabo*, p. 187.

28. Please refer to the *History of the Council of Chalcedon* in Arabic, Chapter 18: 84 and 85, and

the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 108-109 and 159-160.

29. *The History of the Council of Chalcedon*, Chapter 18: 8-83.

30. Please refer to the royal decrees in the *History of the Council of Chalcedon*, 18:89. *The History of Syria* of Madbas, vol. 4:405, and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 145-147 and 168.

31. These people earlier claimed that some of Dioscoros' men, and three monks, followers of Eutyches, and the soldiers forced them to expel Flabyous, and had threatened them with beating and exile, frightened them with swords and other weapons, and thus they signed a blank document. The truth was finally discovered, and they were unable to deny it any longer; thus they confessed their wrong doing. These claims were repeated by several of the Byzantian writers, and several others up to this date including Dr. Asad Rustum in his book *Rum-Byzantines*, vol. 1, p. 126, and in the book, *The Church of the City of God—Antioch*, vol. 1, p. 334; this book did not only contain similar claims, but in addition several of the Nestorians, Protestant, and Latin opinions, and even some of those claims were referred back to sources that had nothing to do with it, and even such claims

would be considered to those same sources as old women's fantasies. (Please read all these events in the *History of the Council of Chalcedon* in Arabic, printed in Rome, and *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 1, p. 528, and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 158-178.

32. *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 1, p. 531, and the *History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, p. 173, 129 and 313.

33. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 231-309.

34. *Mosheem Century*, second part, chapter 5:23.

35. Please refer to the earlier paragraphs of this speech.

36. *The History of the Council of Chalcedon*, chapter 27:163-171.

37. *The History of the Council of Chalcedon*, chapter 28:171-176. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, p. 176 .

38. *The History of the Council of Chalcedon*, chapter 28:187 & 188.

39. *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 1, p 534. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 116-167.

40. *The History of the Coptic Church*, Priest Manassa Pierre Youhanna, p. 310.

41. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 195-

- 198, as derived from the writing of the faithful historians.
42. *Kaldo Athur*, vol. 2, p. 133.
 43. *Ibid*, pp. 132-133.
 44. *The History of Division*, vol. 2, p. 265.
 45. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2, pp. 231-232.
 46. Henoticon. (tr.)
 47. *The History of the Syrian Church of Antioch*, vol. 2 pp. 241-242. *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah* vol. 1 pp. 550–551 and 553-554.
 48. *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 2, p. 124; *The History of Division*, vol. 1, p. 192.
 49. *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 2, p. 124; *The History of Division*.
 50. *Manarat Al-Akdas*, Chapter 2, Section 2, sub-section 4, paragraph 4 of the *Theoretical Recommendation of Bishop Eddoros*, p. 188.
 51. *Al Manarah* M2 F2 B4 and 4 and *Al-Mataleeb Al-Nazarieh*, p. 188.
 52. *Theology*, Michael Mina vol. 1, p. 342, and *Al-Kharidah Al-Nafisah*, vol. 1, pp. 462-481.
 53. *Manarat Al-Akdas* “Minorath Qudshe” and *Al-Mataleeb Al-Nazareyah*, p. 189.
 54. *Ibid*.
 55. *Kaldou Athur*, vol. 2, p. 129.
 56. *The Science of Theology*, Michael Mina, vol. 1, p. 324.
 57. *Al-Mataleeb Al-Nazaryah*, p. 104.
 58. The Fourth Base, chapter 1.
 59. *Al-Mataleeb Al-Nazaryah*, p. 105.
 60. The fourth chapter of the manuscript “Majame” of Ibn El-Mukafa’.
 61. *Ibid* and *Dioscoros*, a book authored by Kumous Armanyous of Ethiopia Shata Al-Barmawi, p. 186 and p. 187.
 62. They object... I have read this verse in several prints and translations..., the prints that are in the hands of the Syrians, Greeks, Europeans, Armenenans, Copts, Croats, Cecilians, Serbs, and Ethiopians. However, the text itself would not give the meaning its value, and this relates to other verses that are derived from the sayings of the Apostles. *Al-Mataleeb Al-Nazareah*, p. 187, chapter 5, section 4 of the fourth division of *Manarat Al-Akdas* of the scholar Bar ‘Ebroyo.
 63. *Theology*, Komos Michael Mina (second edition), vol. 1, p. 336.
 64. Please refer to the *The Age of Councils*, Rev. Kerelus Al-Antony, pp. 216-217.

4 THE RECEPTION OF COUNCILS*

Mor Severius Zakka Iwas

Introduction

For a complete understanding of this subject, we have to know the authority of the councils and the executive power of their decisions.

Saint Athanasius (c. 296-373) said: "The council of Nicaea (325) had pronounced the word of God, and it is existing for ever."¹ The decisions of the councils according to the custom of the ecclesiastical Fathers, were not merely a code of creed or a collection of educational orders, but they are the decrees of God and God Himself is their supreme law maker.

The Doctors of canon law have agreed that "If the right of making a law was confirmed to a law maker, then it is confirmed for the subordinates of his subjects the right of the obligation to obey these laws, because both rights are inseparable; and to trespass any true law, being compulsory obligatory in the mind, is a sin. The power of such a legal law is known as the power of an administrative law."²

It is clear that God had granted the apostles and their successors an authority in the church³ to teach the faithful, therefore they are the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth.⁴ The Lord had ordered them saying: "Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you, and be assured, I am with you always, to the end of the time."⁵ Then he sent them the Holy Spirit, to stay with them for ever,⁶ and to teach them everything, and to remind them all what Christ had told them.⁷ So the authority of the apostles is from God to tend and to teach the people. Thus, if it was confirmed to the apostles the right of making laws, teaching, binding and loosening, it was meanwhile confirmed to the faithful to obey them; and as the authority of the apostles was granted to their successors as well⁸ the faithful have no right to refuse the decisions of these also. Their decisions are of the Holy Spirit; and that he who refuses to listen to them, must

* A paper presented by His Holiness, while he was the Archbishop Mor Severios Zakka, at the Pro Oriente consultation.

then be treated as a pagan or a tax gatherer.⁹

This was what the apostles themselves understood. Saint Paul, the apostle himself, wrote to the Galatians warning them of slipping into strange teachings, saying, “but if anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast.”¹⁰

“So that who does not accept the teachings of the church should be strange to the church of God.” Our Lord said: “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”¹¹

Accordingly, therefore, it becomes clear that the legal ecumenical councils must be accepted. The authority of these councils and the decisions they take must be obeyed by the entire body of the church. If these decisions concern matters of creed, then they must be clinged to by Christians very strongly, and those who do not must be excommunicated.

After the council of Jerusalem had declared its decisions in the year 51, it was announced through Barnabas, Paul, Judas (surnamed Barsaba) and Silas. “So they were sent off on their journey and travelled down to Antioch, where they called the congregation

together, and delivered the letter. When it was read, they all rejoiced at the encouragement it brought.”¹² So the decision was obligatory because it was issued by a supreme authority which was the council of the apostles; that is why the faithful accepted it joyfully, and for them it was a cause of encouragement.

It is mentioned in the church history that a group of the Jews, who became Christians, rejected the decisions of the council of Jerusalem; the church casted them out.¹³

The Reception of the New Testament and the Dogma is based upon the Testimony of the Apostles

The evangelical circumstances at the beginning of Christianity demanded that some of the servants of the Word, be evangelists, pastors, prophets, apostles and teachers, to equip God’s people for work in His service, to build up the body of Christ.¹⁴

In practice, they did not limit their preaching to a certain region or a given nationality, though Peter was called the apostle of the Jews¹⁵ and Paul the apostle of Gentiles.¹⁶ Their work was general, and the authority of each one of them extended to all the churches of the world without being confined to the regions in which each one had preached or the churches he had established.¹⁷

The foundation of the faith relied on the teaching of apostles, which is the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and whenever some contradictory teaching appeared, the church would return to the testimony of the apostles which was unanimously agreed upon by all the apostolic churches,¹⁸ because the principle work of the apostles was to bear witness to the life of Christ, His death, His resurrection and His teaching.¹⁹ The testimony was orally given, because Christ did not give His disciples any manuscript; but when the early Christians found it necessary to write down the Gospel, the four Gospels were written down. The church examined them and all the Scriptures of the New Testament, by returning to those who had seen Christ and heard him guided by the Holy Spirit.²⁰ The church became sure that each one of these scriptures was written down by one of the disciples, or under his supervision. So she decided their lawfulness, for they gained the testimony of the church, which was unanimously accepted, and it was a testimony of the truth, because this unanimity was a decisive evidence for an apostolic testimony.

Thus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the church tested and approved the twenty-seven scriptures of the New Testament.²¹ It became an obligation for all the

believers to receive them without increasing or decreasing even a single letter.

In the same way was the reception of the Dogma which included all the traditional teachings coming down from the disciples, even though the disciples did not legislate them in an Ecumenical council. The reception of any doctrine by the church does not need to be imposed in an Ecumenical council, because the church had received her doctrines from the apostles; the councils were held to defend the true faith and to refute any heresy, by referring to the testimony of the apostles.

That is why we can see the Fathers of the church such as Clement of Alexandria (c. 150- c. 215), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-86) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 330- c. 395) content simply with any statement received by the church, even though it was not issued by an official decision.²²

Such a decision is based upon the testimony of a universal church.

The Nicean's creed, for example, was included within the scriptures of the Fathers in details, and was acceptable by the church since the early days of christianity; but the council formed it in a clear shape, and compelled the believers to receive it under the sentence of excommunication.

Holding of the Councils The apostles held three councils²³ and thus they established the principle of the councils.

But the church, due to the evil persecutions, did not hold councils until the second half of the second century. Thereafter when it began to introduce orders and laws, it became responsible to solve doctrinal problems and to organize the church. Thus the local, general and ecumenical councils were found.²⁴ The Reception of the Councils The decisions of the councils were consciously received²⁵ by the believers, and their judgements were carried out by their authorities immediately after they were issued without any disturbance, whatever the ecclesiastical rank or the social class.

The decision of the local, general and ecumenical councils were regarded to be of a divine source... The Ecumenical council had the most supreme authority over the universal church;²⁶ that is why its decisions had a decisive obligatory power over the entire church.

The ancient official documents show that the early christians regarded the decisions concerning doctrine issued by the Nicaean Ecumenical council in the year 325 as spontaneously infallible, and had an obligatory acceptable

authority, that is to say: "They are incontestable in faith, and all Christians regarded them as an expression of a heavenly grace and divine order." The reason being that the decisions taken by the Ecumenical council pertained to the Divine order, as it was quoted in the Edict of the Emperor Constantine, when he declared the decisions of the Nican's council.²⁷ Anyway we must mention here with great sorrow that the interference of the Roman Empire in the church's own religious affair, officially, spoiled the spiritual quality of the councils.

However virtuous the aim of the state might sometimes be in solving the religious problems by means of Ecumenical councils, its influence created from the local problem an international one, thus helping the division of the church.

The Reception of the Local and the General Councils within their area is easier than the Reception of the Ecumenical Council throughout the entire Church

As soon as a decision of a local or a General council was issued, it was submitted to the local church or Apostolic see; for example, the decisions issued by the two General councils held against Origen (c. 185-c. 254), who in an excess of zeal, mutilated himself, misinterpreting (Mt. 19:12) in a

literal sense.

And for accepting to be ordained a priest by bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem without his bishop's consultation, Anba Demetrius deposed Origen from the priesthood and set him into exile.

Although Origen was a pious Doctor of international influence, the church immediately accepted the decision issued against him, and if the case of Origen was discussed in an Ecumenical council he would have been supported by most of the churches in the world.²⁸

Here is another example of decisions of the general and local councils that were carried out immediately after they were issued and the church receiving them without any uproar. This was the excommunication of Paul of Samosata, patriarch of Antioch (3rd century). His teaching was that our Lord Jesus Christ was only a human being. Consequently, he was deposed of his see in the council of Antioch in 268. Paul of Samosata obeyed the order of the council, without any resistance, and the church satisfactorily received the decision.²⁹

Thus the problem was solved without interference from the government. It is not fair to compare Origen, the great scholar, the international philosopher, and the pious man, with Arius the

arrogant priest; neither is it fair to compare the supreme rank of Paul of Samosata, the patriarch, with the mentioned Arius. Nevertheless, the trial of Origen was held at a local council, and its decision was immediately received. Arius was condemned to be excommunicated in the time of pope Peter in a local council held in Alexandria without any disturbance at that time. Afterwards, however, Arius returned to the church during the time of Anba Arsheela, and returned again to his heresy in the time of Alexandrius. His case became international, and it was examined in the Nicaean Ecumenical Council in the year 325, which was held according to the call of Emperor Constantinus. Three hundred and eighteen bishops were present, among whom were two Ariusian bishops. After a long dispute, the council condemned Arius and sentenced him for excommunication and exile.

Consequently, the Nicean Creed was formed,³⁰ and the bishops returned to their countries, but disputes arose in the church and the Arius party began to increase in strength after the council. The disputes were more political and racial than religious, and while the Nicean Council decision was accepted by one group, the other group rejected it, and alas, the followers of Arius

became one hundred million in number, and in every short time they caused a severe harm to the church.

Their evil would have remained until today, if it was not for their self-divisions.

Eventually the Arian party disappeared, as many of them rejoined the true church. While we are studying the subject of the council's reception, it is inevitable to mention two complicated questions. The first was the question of Easter, and the second was the baptism of the heretics. These were the causes of disagreement in the church in its early days, but the church had found the solution for them.

The Examination and Reception of the Local and General Councils by the Ecumenical Council

Before the Council of Nicaea in the year 325, many councils were held in the centres of the Holy Sees and Dioceses; these councils issued many decisions about faith and order, and these decisions were received at their regions.

The Council of Nicaea examined the decisions of these Local and General councils concerning the question of faith and order, such as the question of Easter and the Heretical Baptism, as we have mentioned before.

The Council of Nicaea issued

a decision which was taken to be heavenly and thus became strictly obligatory. The decisions of the Local and General councils, which was agreeable with the testimony of the apostolic church, were considered to be ecumenical. St. Julius, the Pope of Rome, said "as to me it is necessary to return to the apostolic Canon for discussing the ecclesiastical questions, not the eloquency, and don't I know why you got angry with my letter? Is it because I have invited you to attend the council? You have to know that those who have confidence in their behaviours are not afraid of having their conducts be examined."³¹

That is why we see that the great Council of Nicaea had discussed the decisions of the Local and General council held before and then gave decisions an ecumenical quality.

The traditions that were acknowledged by the church were represented in councils and these traditions could not be abolished by individual influence, whatever and however influential these individuals might be.

The old documents indicate that the Fathers of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea and the whole Christendom at that time considered the decisions concerning the Doctrine that were issued by the Council of Nicaea spontaneously infallible and

authoritative, that is to say they were "indisputable in the faith and the Christians should consider them as expressions of heavenly grace and divine order."³²

Emperor Constantine, in his letter to the church of Alexandria, said that "all what the 318 Fathers of the church had decided must be considered as divine judgement, and I am sure that there is no one amongst you bishops who respects them or hesitates to fulfill them."³³ That is why the Emperor took charge of issuing the Nicene decisions and announced them amongst the church to carry them out.

Obstacles on the Way of the Council's Reception

The Council of Nicaea wanting to carry out its decisions wanted the apostolic Holy Sees to retain privileges of authority derived from civil and not from religious considerations.

But this same authority became the cause of the strong conflict between the state and the church.

In the West, where the center of the government was transferred from Rome to Ravenna, the influence of the Pope in Rome increased and he gained independence to administer the church. The same thing happened in Egypt where the influence of the Pope of Alexandria was beyond

the reach of the government. But in Constantinople, the Patriarch was no more than a government official compared with the monarch's power.

In consequence, the church became one of the government offices and the Emperor became the actual head of the church and the absolute monarch judging the disagreements on the Doctrine, and the executor of the council's decisions.³⁴

The interference of the authorities in solving the problems and its attempts to submit the church to its order brought to the church uncountable misfortunes and pains.

Emperor Constantine who once said in a letter, "The decisions pronounced by the ecumenical Council are but divine ones,"³⁵ turned back from his ideas and ordered a council to be held in Jerusalem in the year 335, wherein it was decided to cancel the sentence of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea against Arius, and ordered Arius to return from his exile to Alexandria. Constantine wrote to Athanasius to receive Arius back to communion but the influence of Athanasius had been so increased in Egypt at that time that his bishops obeyed him following the decision of the Council of Nicaea. He refused the orders of the Emperor saying, "He who was excommunicated by an ecumenical

council can be loosened only by another ecumenical council because he who has the power to bind he alone has the power to loosen.”³⁶

The enraged Emperor ordered a council to be held in Tyre to get rid of Athanasius. He accused him of a political charge and he was sentenced to exile. In the year 336, the Emperor called Arius to Constantinople to pray in the church and ordered Patriarch Alexandrius to accept him in his company, but Alexandrius answered the Emperor saying, “He who was divested of his priestly office by an ecumenical council, no one has the right to return him to his office except the ecumenical council.”³⁷

The Reception of an Ecumenical Council by a following Ecumenical Council

Socrates, the historian, in his speech about the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in the year 381, said the following: “Theodosius, Roman Emperor, called for the Orthodox bishops to hold a council to support the faith of the Council of Nicea and to manage to ordain the bishop of Constantinople.”³⁸ Suzimua the historian said: “The Emperor gathered quickly a council of the bishops who were of his own faith, to agree with what was decided in Nicea, and judged that the faith

of Nicea would remain firm and to neglect all the heresy; and to run all the churches everywhere according to the old canons.”³⁹ There is no doubt that the Fathers of the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople received the decrees of the Council of Nicea and fixed its Creed, and explained what concerned the question of the Incarnation, and added this statement: “And we believe in the Holy Spirit etc.” and they excommunicated Macedonius and his two followers and commanded to carry out what the council arranged and it was received by the whole Christian church though the bishops of the West did not take part in it.⁴⁰ Then it came about that the Third Ecumenical Council to be held in Ephesus in the year 431 to study the heresy of Nestorius and it decided in their seventh canon that it is not permissible for anyone to put forward, to write, or to compile another faith except the faith that was put by the Fathers assembled by the Holy Spirit in the city of Nicea.⁴¹

The Ecumenical Council Received by the Syrian Church

The Syrian Orthodox Church and its sisters the Oriental Orthodox Churches accept only three ecumenical councils which are the Council of Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431). The Syrian Church

cluded the acknowledgement of these councils, in the Diptychs of the Fathers in the mass, and it cites the Nicæan Creed that was put forward by these councils, and oblige everyone who wants to accept the sacrament of Baptism to announce his acknowledgement of this Creed. The same applies in the case of confession and in the case of ordaining deacons, priests and bishops. According to the Syrian Church, the quality of the ecumenical council does not depend on the number of its members but on its representation of all the sectors of the apostolic churches bearing the testimony of the teaching of the apostles. Therefore after the Council of Nîcheus, which was the third ecumenical council (431), it became impossible to have ecumenical councils.

The Reception of the Councils Today

There is no doubt that local and general councils are accepted within their own territories and these are not the subjects of our discussion. As for the ecumenical councils, the Oriental Orthodox churches recognize three of them mentioned earlier, whereas other orthodox churches recognize ten, and the Roman Catholic churches recognize twenty-one. In our attempt to reach a Christian unity, we see ourselves facing an

immense obstacle which should be overcome before we can arrive at this supreme goal.

The conditions of the ecumenical councils are not fulfilled in the councils that some of our churches recognize to be ecumenical; hence other churches do not find it easy to accept them.

The three ecumenical councils recognized by the Universal church were held when Christendom felt the dangers threatening the true Christian doctrine. The aim of holding a council is to preserve the doctrine that was once delivered by the saints; and the judgement of the truthfulness of the doctrine is the apostolic tradition which is the unanimous apostolic testimony.

Isn't our acceptance of the New Testament based upon these testimonies, as mentioned above? The Fathers of the church unanimously decided that the scriptures of the New Testament which were passed from hand to hand in the church in those days, and which are in our own hands today, were written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, by or under command of the apostles who heard the teachings of our Lord and saw these miracles---- His passion, His resurrection, and His Ascension. That is why we are consciously obliged to accept these true testimonies.

We are again obliged to accept

every teaching that the early Fathers of the church unanimously accepted, although these teachings did not reach us through ecumenical councils. For a council to be ecumenical, it must be in harmony with the teachings of the apostles and the early Christian Fathers, and should be received by the apostolic churches who participate in it.⁴² If the testimony is not unanimously accepted by the apostolic churches, then the council will not be ecumenical. Thus we can understand the objection raised by John of Antioch against the Council of Ephesus (431) not considering it to be Ecumenical as the church of Antioch was not represented. Cyril of Alexandria was blamed for his opening of the council meeting without waiting for John of Antioch and for the bishops of the Orient. John then held a council in which he excommunicated Cyril, and Memnon, bishop of Ephesus, with the charge of being unjust.⁴³ The Council of Ephesus did not become ecumenical until Cyril and John were reconciled in 433, when John received the council and signed the excommunication of Nestorius; meanwhile Cyril signed the excommunication of Abolinarius.

And thus by the reconciliation of the two Patriarchs, the third council was considered to be ecumenical and its decisions were

received by the entire church and they were announced by the Emperor.⁴⁴

The approval of John of Antioch for the decisions of the council of Ephesus do not mean that John was the head of the universal church; but it shows the necessity for the ecumenical councils to be accepted by the legal heads of the Holy Sees of whom John was one in those days.⁴⁵

The Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381, was attended by Oriental bishops, who relied on the apostolic testimony and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to preserve the true teaching.⁴⁶ Immediately after closing the meeting of the council, its decisions were announced through all the heads of the churches including Damasus, the Pope of Rome, who did not attend the council or send a representative.⁴⁷ The council stated that "the statement of the faith was so arranged that churches who enjoyed the same faith, were always passionately attached to this faith."⁴⁸ Thus the Western church recognized the legality of the council and received it as an ecumenical one.

So the Christian churches today should together study all the councils, which should be examined according to the traditions of the apostles and the decisions of the three ecumenical councils which all the churches

cognize, and the teachings of the forefathers which is the true testimony.

History confirms that, some times, certain questions which had no connection with religion occurred, and that human weakness clearly appeared in those councils.

But we believe that the teachings of the legal councils were preserved by the Holy Spirit. We don't forget that the interference of the Roman Empire, as we have previously mentioned, increased the disagreements and discouraged dissensions; liberality and openness were limited, and the human horror of jail, exile, communication, and destitution kept the tongues of many Fathers silent, or away from the truth.

History was sometimes written by extremely cruel and unjust persons. Reading ecclesiastical history makes us feel ashamed of the long history of hatred of some people who were supposed to be trusted to guard the law of love, concord, pardon and forgiveness. So it is in the spirit of love and understanding that our councils must be studied. Since the councils are held to fix the doctrine, as we have mentioned above, let us study their decisions, without taking too much care of the minutes of their meetings.

The revision and the study

of the councils do not imply the lessening of their authority.

For example, following the Addis Ababa conference in 1965, "Al-Karaza Review" (issued in Arabic in Egypt)⁴⁹ wrote the following: "The sacred synod of the Coptic Church examined the decisions of the conference. In that synod some of the decisions were immediately received and the rest was postponed for a further study, though the Patriarchs of Oriental Orthodox Churches and bishops of these churches attended that conference."

I feel happy to state here that the Syrian Orthodox Church which rejects the Ariusian Council of Antioch (AD 341) and its creed, accepts the moral canons of that council for they match the apostolic canons.⁵⁰ The Syrian church rejects also the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) considering the tome of Leo as a renewal of Nestorianism, nevertheless the Syrian church had adopted some canons of the Council of Chalcedon.

Mar Gregorius Bar 'Ebroyo Catholicos of the East (13th century) had cited five of these canons and added them to his book of canon law, called "The Book of Guidance." These canons are the following: 1. The Monasteries (1:2). 2. The Charity (1:3). 3. "The church's Deputy and Manager (1:4). 4. The order of the Diocese

(7:1) and 5. The Monkhoo (7:10). What an open-minded scholar Bar 'Ebroyo was? And like him were most of the Fathers of the Syrian Church. In spite of their rejecting the creed of the council which they did not recognize, they did not mind accepting the moral canons which were good for the institution of the church, though they were introduced in a council rejected by the church.

So let us look at all the councils and study their decisions in the light of Apostolic tradition which is the true testimony of the Apostles and forefathers. Let us do that in the spirit of understanding and with the Guidance of the Holy Spirit so that we may get good results. Let us sincerely hope that we arrive at fruitful results, which will bring us closer together.

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2. Rev. Namat-Allah Abu Karam Al, *Marooni Kustas Al Ahkam* (in Arabic) (Beirut 1901) vol. 2, 90.

3. Mt. 18:18.

4. Ti. 3:15.

5. Mt. 28:20.

6. Jn. 14:16.

7. Jn. 14:26.

8. 1 Ti. 5:22, 6:2. And. Ac. 1:24, 20:28. And Bishop Alexandros Geeha, *Christian Church History*

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9. Mt. 18:17.

10. Gal. 1:8-9.

11. Lk. 10:16.

12. Ac. 15:28.

13. Rev. Isaa Asaad. Al-Tarpha, *Church History* (in Arabic) (Homs - Syria, 1924) 42-43.

14. Eph. 4:11-12; Gal. 2:7-8.

15. Rom. 15:16 and Ti. 2:7 and II Tim. 1:11.

16. Acts 10,11

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18. H. B. Cyril Makkar, Roman Catholic Patriarch of Alexandria. *Foundation of the church* (in Arabic) (1925), Vol. 2, 225-226-334.

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33. The same author, 330.
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35. *Al-Khreedā, Church History*, Vol. 1, 329.
36. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, F. L. Cross, 1958, 85. And the story of the Coptic Church, Vol. 1, 198-199.
37. *The Story of the Coptic Church*, Vol. 1, 204.
38. *History of Socrates*, 8:5.
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40. Al-Tarpha, 105-107.
41. *Al-Khreedā*, Vol. 1, 488. And *Al-Neema Review* (in Arabic) (Damascus, 1960), N. 2, 53.
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46. 1 Ti 1,4.
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5

NECESSITY AND SIGNS OF COMMUNIO BETWEEN THE LOCAL CHURCHES

Mor Severios Zakka Iwas

The Local Church In the early days of Christianity the term “Church” was not used to denote a house of worship. The early Christians did not have special houses for worship; they used to meet together in private houses or caves for prayer, the breaking of bread and receiving Communion. We read, however, in the book of the Acts of the Apostles: “Barnabas then left for Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him he brought him to Antioch. As things turned out they were to live together in that Church a whole year, instructing a large number of people,”¹ from which we infer that the reference to a place as a “Church” was a later development of the word. On the other hand, the traditional meaning of “Church” in its wider sense refers to that divine institution which embraces all the believers in Christ the Son of God, whatever their localities, nationalities or races. They are united by a true and common belief in the victory of Christ over

Satan, sin and death, and in His final glorification. This is what the Lord meant by: “I will build my Church”², and what Luke meant by: “Day by * day the Lord added to their community (Ecclesia) those destined to be saved;”³ and what the Apostle Paul meant by: “The Church of God which he bought with his own blood.”⁴

The Lord Jesus, however, uses the term again in a different sense. He says, “But if he refuses to listen to these, report it to the community (Ecclesia).”⁵ The Apostle Paul says: “And the Church which meets in her house,”⁶ where the reference is to the local Church. He also uses the term in the plural:

“The Churches of God in Christ Jesus,”⁷ and “All the Churches of Christ send greetings,”⁸ and yet again “as in all the Churches of the saints.”⁹ We also read about “The Church in Jerusalem,”¹⁰ and “the Churches in Galatia,”¹¹ and also “All the Churches of Asia,”¹² and so on. From these quotations

* A paper presented by His Holiness, Pro Oriente while he was Archbishop Mor Severios Zakka, at a Pro Oriente consultation.

we conclude that the Churches in the early days of Christianity were named after the cities in which the Christian believers lived. Those early Christians who grouped together all over the known world formed many local Churches which were united by a common faith. Each of those local Churches constituted the mystical body of Christ as long as it bore the attributes of that body. The union of those Churches did not bring about a loss of identity or independence because Christ was the head. They did not only include their constituent members but also Christ himself in His living person who was active in their various sacraments and also the Holy Spirit their leader and guide to the truth. When the Church is separated from Christ and the Holy Spirit it becomes a mere social body unstable and unbalanced.

Each individual in the Church remains a living unit as long as he is united with Christ as the branch is united to the vine. Indeed, he himself is a Church headed by Christ. Mor Ephraim the Syrian (obit. 373) when advising the believer to concentrate during his prayer says, "Let your body become as a Church for you, and your mind as a glorified Altar;" in this he quotes the Apostle Paul, "Didn't you realise that you were God's temple and that the Spirit

of God was living among you?" and "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God."¹³ That the relation of the individual to the Church is of the utmost importance is also demonstrated by the following statement of Saint Paul, "Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ in the one Spirit. We were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink ... as it is the parts are many but the body is one."¹⁴ The union of the local Church with the universal Church is similar to the union of the individual with the Church in that it does not strip him of his personal traits and individuality. Just as the believer who has received baptism and confirmation and has partaken of the body and blood of the Lord and has grown in grace would lose life in Christ if he were separated from the mystical body of Christ (which is the Church itself), similarly the local Church which has been endowed with graces and gifts and its proper autonomy would lose the divine grace if it were no longer united with the universal Church. When it is united with the universal Church in one faith it is a true representation of it and

is equally considered the Divine Body of Christ.

Our belief in the Holy Sacrament (The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ) provides us with a clear example or rather a smaller picture of the relationship between the individual believer and the Church on the one hand and the relation between the local Church and the universal Church on the other. Each piece of the Sacrament, however minute it is, represents Christ in his totality as fully as does the complete Holy Sacrament.

And when the believer takes a small part of the Holy Sacrament or a single drop of the Lord's cup, that is His Holy Blood, it is as if he had partaken of the Body and Blood of Christ in their entirety because the Body of Christ is indivisible in the Holy Sacrament.¹⁵

The division is only apparent; the Body remains completely present in every part of it. The existence of Christ in Heaven and in the Sacrament when it is validly consecrated represents His presence in the universal Church and in the local ones and in every true believer in Christ, the focal point and the living head of the Church. By way of analogy we may cite the incident of the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost when there occurred an apparent division of the Holy Spirit in the

form of tongues of fire which settled on the heads of each of the disciples, and the Holy Spirit in His entirety had entered each one of them. The local Church is related to the universal Church in a similar way; the local Church is a smaller version of the universal Church and the universal Church is a larger version of the local Church. They are completely identical in essence but different in size.

The Communion in one faith which binds all the local Churches into a universal Church is the Communion of the Holy Spirit and the Communion of the Saints.¹⁶ There appeared at the dawn of Christianity material communion also in the Church of Jerusalem, for example, where "The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common."¹⁷ But basically it was a spiritual unity of which the Apostle Paul says, "Thanking the Father who has made it possible for you to join the Saints," and, "after all, if you were cut from your natural wild olive to be grafted unnaturally onto a cultivated olive, it will be much easier for them, the natural branches, to be grafted back on the tree they came from." Saint Paul also draws attention to the meaning of Communion, "in making these gifts, he has given the guarantee of something very great and wonderful to come; through

hem you will be able to share the divine nature and to escape corruption in a world that is sunk in vice.”¹⁸ This Communion transcends the earth’s boundaries and takes the believer to heaven and hence to “the whole Church in which every one is a first-born son and citizen of heaven.”¹⁹

The Attributes (Signs) of the Church At the dawn of Christianity the Fathers of the Church defined four signs of the Church which later on came to be recognized as its distinctive features and were recommended by the Nicene Creed as follows: “We believe in One, Holy, Universal, Apostolic Church.” Trying to understand the necessity of Communion between the local Churches it might be helpful to explain what is meant by that definition.

The Church is One

The One universal Church consists of all the local Churches which are united by a common faith. The Apostle Paul says in this context, “There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope ... and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all.”²⁰ The Church therefore cannot have one body if the beliefs of its members were not one and the same faith. This faith is professed through practicing the Holy Sacrament.” Sacrament”, as a

theological term, refers to the Holy Act through which the believer receives an invisible and intangible grace through a visible and tangible substance. The purpose of this practice is justification and holiness.²¹ Hence St. Paul says, “In the one we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.”²² Through baptism the believer receives justification and holiness, and the sacrament of baptism cannot be completed without the confession by the catechumen of the Orthodox faith in front of the authorized priest. And when he receives the sacrament of baptism he becomes a member of the one Body and a son of God by Grace and an heir with Christ and one of the faithful and he has the right to enjoy partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ. St. Paul explains this as follows: “The blessing-cup that we bless is a Communion with the Body of Christ. The fact that there is only one loaf means that, though there are many of us, we form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf.”²³ The unity of the Church is therefore achieved through the partaking of the Body and Blood of the Lord which means that Communion cannot be consummated except by Jesus Christ, who, when He instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, commanded

His disciples to “do this as a memorial of Me.”²⁴ Therefore, by participating in this Holy Sacrament, the faithful profess their belief in the incarnate Lord Jesus who died for the salvation of humanity and who rose from the grave glorified and ascended to Haven. They also proclaim this great yearning and expectation of His Second Coming, so that they all enjoy with Him the true light. This common belief, together with the practicing of the Sacrament of the Holy Church, is a clear sign of the spiritual Communion of the faithful in the one Body, both in words and actions. The Apostle says therefore, when he writes to the Corinthians, “All the same, I do appeal to you, brothers, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make up the differences between you, and instead of disagreeing among yourselves, to be united again in your belief and practice. From what Chloe’s people have been telling me, my dear brothers, it is clear that there are serious differences among you.

What I mean are all these slogans that you have, like: “I am for Paul,” “I am for Apollos I am for Cephas,” “I am for Christ.” Has Christ been parcelled out? Was it Paul that was crucified for you? Were you baptised in the name of Paul?”²⁵ This helps us to have a deeper understanding of the prayer of Lord Jesus that “there

should be only one flock and one shepherd”²⁶ which implies that all Churches should unite in one faith both in words and actions.²⁷

The Church is Universal The ecumenical Church is universal because it is not confined to one nation or one race or one language. It is for the whole world. This is how the Lord had wished it to be when he commanded his disciples “Go therefore, make disciples of all nations,”²⁸ and “Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation”²⁹ and “. . . then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth.”³⁰

So the Lord had wanted a universal Church embracing all races and nations quite different from the exclusive practices of the Jews. The Apostles carried out His mission as we read in the letter sent by Saint Paul to the Romans, “Your faith is spoken of all over the world.”³¹ The concept of a universal Church does not at all imply that it should have a visible and central government - something that had no precedent in history - but that all the local Churches of the various races and languages should be united by a common faith in one universal Church. The Church is universal because it is one, and it is one because it is universal.

The Church is Holy The

Church is Holy because Christ has loved it and “sacrificed Himself for her to make her Holy. He made her clean by washing her in water with a form of words, so that when he took her to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but Holy and faultless.”³² And since the Church concerns itself with the sinner and his salvation through the merits of the death of Christ and His Resurrection and with the justification and holiness, of its members it is a school for holiness. This holiness belongs to all members of the Church who are mentioned by the Apostle Paul as follows: “Not long ago, you were foreigners and enemies, in the way that you used to think and the evil things that you did; but now he has reconciled you by his death and in that mortal body. Now you are able to appear before him holy, pure and blameless.”³³ “To the Church of God in Corinth, to the holy people of Jesus Christ, who are called to take their place among all the Saints everywhere.”³⁴ The members of the Holy Church, therefore, are required to be Saints in accordance with the teaching of the Lord: “You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”³⁵ And Christ prayed to His Father to “consecrate them in the truth...”³⁶ so that they would achieve that aim of perfection.

The sign of holiness is also

attributed to the Church because it holds firmly to the truth and protects the jewel of the Orthodox faith and encourages virtuous conduct, and, in particular, because Christ Himself is the head, and because it has many witnesses who are the martyrs and the Saints who are the Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven and are the Victorious Church. But since the Church on earth is constantly struggling against sin, it must of necessity include among its members the good and the evil, just like the field which grows both wheat and tares. This, however, does not detract from its merits for the Lord has advised to “Let them both grow till the harvest.”³⁷

The Church is Apostolic
The Lord Jesus has established His Church and transmitted his teachings through His Apostles. The Apostle Paul says, “You are part of a building that has the Apostles and Prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone.”³⁸ The Church is therefore said to be Apostolic.

The Apostolic Authority
The Lord chose His Apostles and entrusted to them the affairs of the Church. He sent them to the whole world saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise

them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you.

And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.”³⁹ The Lord authorized His Apostles to govern the Church, to look after its members and to guide them to the truth. The authority invested in the Apostles includes giving instruction guiding to holiness as well as caring for its members. The Lord commanded the faithful to obey them and threatened severe punishment to whomever disobeys them,⁴⁰ because obeying them means obeying Him and His Father.⁴¹ The Apostles have enjoyed and practiced those rights and privileges.⁴²

The Apostle,s Successors Anxious to organize and maintain the ecclesiastical life, the Apostles have appointed successors.⁴³ They have invested in them the authority which had been given them from the Lord. They entrusted to their successors alone the authority to ordain priests ie. the laying of hands on whomever they think is suitable for priestly service.⁴⁴ The Apostle Paul says to his disciple Timothy, “That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you,” and “Do not be too quick to lay hands on any man.”⁴⁵ And he said to his disciple Titus,

“The reason I left you behind in Crete was for you to get everything organised there and to appoint elders in every town, in the way that I told you.”⁴⁶ The Church is also called apostolic because its pastors have accepted the apostolic authority from the Lord through the apostles themselves and so they are the legitimate successors through a continuous succession. The Apostolic authority of each of the successors is confined to the boundaries of his See. Each participates with his colleagues, the other apostles, in their authority over the Church in general through the Council, following the example of the Apostles who used to convene a Council to solve controversial issues. The Council which they formed had the highest authority for drawing up the Creed and laying down Canons binding to the faithful.

Their authority was even considered to be that of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts which was written after the Council of Jerusalem (AD 51). We read, “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials; you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals, and from fornication.”⁴⁷

The participation of an Apostle in the Council of Apostles implies his participation in one

faith. And this is imperative for each Apostle because if he isolates himself from that participation he severs himself from the Apostolic service, even from that of his own See. He becomes alienated from the Church as a whole and consequently from Christ Himself Who is the head of the Church. This, in fact, is what happened to Judas Iscariot who separated himself from the Council of his brothers, the Apostles, ceased to be one of them and perished, "After having been one of our number and actually sharing this ministry of ours,"⁴⁸ as the Apostle Peter said.

The Importance of the Apostolic Churches As the Faith grew and the number of Churches increased in the world and the Apostolic Age came to an end, the Apostles were replaced by their disciples who were instructed by them and whom they ordained by the laying on of hands. These were succeeded by other bishops. There eventually appeared in the Church heresies alien to the true nature of Christianity and it was then that the significance of the Churches established by the Apostles themselves became clear. They were the Churches which faithfully preserved the written as well as the oral teachings as St. Paul says to his disciple Timothy, "You have heard everything that I teach in public; hand it on to reliable people so

that they in turn will be able to teach others."⁴⁹ And so, when the local and then the ecumenical Councils were held to refute those heresies and to establish the true teachings and the orthodox faith, they relied on the evidence of the Apostles, both written and oral, and on the documents of faith which the Apostles had delivered to the Churches which they had established as local and universal Apostolic Churches.⁵⁰ This is clear from the statement of Tertullian (obit. 240), "If you want to try harder to achieve salvation go visiting the Apostolic Churches where the Apostolic Sees exist till the present time, where you can read their original letters reflecting their voices and images. If Achaia is far from you make for Corinth; if you live close to Macedonia go to Philippi, and if you can go to Asia there you can find Ephesus, and if you live near Italy go to Rome."⁵¹ Iranaeus (obit 202), the famous martyr Bishop of Lyon, said, "Whoever seeks the Truth should look at every Church which ordains Apostles, which are known all over the world. We can consider that all the Apostles who were ordained there as well as their successors to our day are Bishops in those Churches. They were remote then from the ravings of the heretics." He then cites Rome which was the closest Church to him and which was considered to be the first

Church in the West saying, "By this very same succession we receive the ordination of the Apostles and the true teaching of the Church.

Polycarp, as well as being a disciple of the Apostles and having lived with many who had seen Christ, was made a Bishop by the Apostles in Asia of the Church of Izmir. We saw him in our youth because he lived long and he left this life an aged man, a celebrated and glorious martyr. The Church of Ephesus also, which was established by Paul and in which John lived till the time of Trajan, is further evidence of the truth of the ordination of the Apostles."⁵²

The Emergence of the Apostolic Sees

The Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum I wrote, "The Christians were united by an organized clerical system which has three orders: First, *the Bishop* who is the head of the clergy and of the Church; he governs and provides instructions and he ordains the clergy in their various ranks and orders. Secondly, *the Priest* who administers the Sacrament and preaches, and thirdly, *the deacon* who attends the Bishop and the Priest in the performance of the Liturgy and the Divine Sacraments.

Several districts were annexed to the episcopates of the large cities: the North African district was annexed to the Episcopate

of Carthage; Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Armenia, the Euphrates, Edessa, Mesopotamia and Persia were joined to the Episcopate of Antioch; Egypt and Kairouan and the neighbouring areas were joined with the Episcopate of Alexandria; Italy and the other European countries were joined to the episcopate of Rome. In the middle of the fifth Century each of the Bishops of the three major Sees, and of Antioch in particular, was called a Patriarch. As for the title of Pope it was given in the third and fourth centuries and even later than this, to several bishops. It was a long time afterwards that the Bishops of Rome restricted the titles to themselves. The ecumenical Councils defined the powers of the major Apostolic Sees and affiliated all the Episcopates with the diocese of a Metropolitan.⁵³

The sixth Canon of the Council of Nicea (AD 325) states the following: "The old practice should be maintained for Libya and the other five cities, so that the Bishop of Alexandria would have authority over these districts, just as the Bishop of Rome maintains a similar practice. This practice should also be maintained in Antioch and in the other Sees of the Church which still enjoy their old privileges. The very obvious general principle which underlies all this is that the Bishop who is ordained without the consent of

the Metropolitan (the Bishop of the major city) is not considered a Bishop by the General Council which says that such a man should not be a Bishop.⁵⁴

The unity of the faith made it necessary for the new Bishop to send letters to his fellow bishops under the same See asking for a Sign of Communion. This letter would include a declaration of his faith, so that the Bishops would grant him the sign of Communion as an acknowledgement of his new rank. When one of them was elected Bishop to one of the major Apostolic Sees, he would send to the other Bishops of the major Apostolic Sees a similar confession of his faith. This letter would normally be written during the Council which had elected him and he would ask the Bishops to grant him Communion.

After they had ascertained that his faith was sound they would write to him congratulating him, acknowledging his new position, and granting him the Sign of Communion in one faith.

It must be remembered that the reason why some of the Apostolic Sees were held to be superior to others was the higher worldly importance attached to them because of their political position. Such superiority is subject to change, however, and this is what happened to the

See of Constantinople when the second ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople (AD 381) decided in the third Canon that that See should rank before the See of Alexandria and after that of Rome, mainly because of the political importance which Constantinople had acquired. It had become an imperial city like Rome and was called New Rome.

It is worth mentioning that the practice of giving the Sign of Communion is an Apostolic tradition. The Apostle Paul wrote, "So, James, Cephas and John, these leaders, these pillars, shook hands with Barnabas and me as a sign of partnership. We were to go to the pagans and they to the circumcised."⁵⁵ It is a well known fact that the Canons of the Church prevent the Bishops from interfering in each other's Diocese and from carrying out ordinations outside their Diocese. The Council of Nicea decided in its fifth Canon that "Those who have been prohibited from Communion, be they clergy or laity, should be treated according to the rule, for those who are rejected by some people cannot be accepted by others."

The law, however, has allowed the Bishop to interfere in the affairs of another Diocese in one case only: when he feels that the Christian faith is threatened. That was the case of the Patriarch Cyril

of Alexandria when he interfered with the affairs of Nestorius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople. He fought against the heresy of Nestorius, first by publishing his Easter manifesto and then by his letters to Nestorius and to the Monks and to the Kings and to the Clergy of Constantinople. He says, "The Council purifies the Church." He, following the recommendation of Canon 125 of the Council of Carthage, held a Council in Alexandria to discuss the views of Nestorius, exercising the right, given to a Bishop at the Council of Carthage, to interfere in the affairs of neighbouring Dioceses if the Bishop of that Diocese fails to refute heresies, let alone when he is the originator. Cyril also wrote to the Bishops of the major Sees after Nestorius had written to them, urging them not to be deceived by his teachings.⁵⁶

Local and Ecumenical Councils When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on Pentecost and the Church was born in Jerusalem, it was considered the

"Mother of Churches" because most of the Apostles were still living there and their combined decision had complete authority over the Church everywhere. It even had power over the Apostles themselves. Philip went to Samaria and preached the teachings of Jesus. Many believed and were baptised, "And when the Apostles

heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God they sent Peter and John."⁵⁷ We also read in the Book of Acts about a visit by a group of disciples from Cyrene and Cyprus to Antioch where they proclaimed the teachings of Christ to the Greeks. Many believed in their mission and accepted the Lord, "The Church in Jerusalem heard about this and they sent Barnabas to Antioch."⁵⁸

The local Churches looked to the Apostles in Jerusalem for guidance and for a final decision when disagreements arose in the Church. This is what happened in the Church of Antioch concerning the question of circumcision when representatives were sent to Jerusalem seeking advice. A Council of Apostles was held in the year AD 51 and decided the issue.⁵⁹ The Church has continued this practice of holding Councils, because of its regulations and decree, as we have remarked earlier, that no Bishop should have authority over the Diocese of another Bishop.

In the event of a disagreement between Bishops about an ecclesiastical problem it was found necessary to convene a Council of Bishops to settle the dispute. The old laws had specified that the local Council should meet twice a year.⁶⁰ Later Councils made the meetings less frequent because of

e difficulties of travel and other
fficulties.

These resolutions simply
dicate the significance of the local
hurch and the authority of the
cal Council within its recognized
rritory. It was on this basis that
e Council of the Bishops of
ntioch met in the 3rd Century
o discuss the views of its Bishop
aul of Samasotta and decided to
xcommunicate him.⁶¹ The local
ouncil also had authority over
e Bishops within its territory.
t had the right to elect, ordain
s well as transfer or dismiss the
ishops. The 27th Canon of the
ourth Council of Carthage (AD
56) decreed the following:

“The Bishop should not
e promoted simply to give him
onour. But should the needs of
he Church require it and if his
ransfer has been requested by the
lergy and the laity, the Council of
ishops should see to his transfer
and another Bishop should be
ordained to take his place.”⁶²

The ecumenical Council, on
the other hand, comprises clergy
of all nationalities and languages,
united by a common faith. It
therefore represents the Holy
Apostolic Universal Church which
includes the local Churches all over
the world. Bishops from all parts
of the world are invited to attend
it and taking into consideration
the individual as well as the
spatio-temporal circumstances

of the Council, it could be rightly
described as an “Ecumenical”
Council. Furthermore it represents
the Council of the Apostles,
which means that it is the highest
authority in the Church.⁶³ What
it decrees is binding and must
be followed by the Churches all
over the world, whether they are
represented in it or not. We cite as
an example the ecumenical Council
which was held in Constantinople
in AD 381. The Bishop of Rome,
Damasus, was invited and failed
to attend or send a deputy.⁶⁴ This
incident did not make the Council
less valid. What the 150 Fathers of
the Council decided, was based
on the evidence of the Apostolic
Churches and with the guidance
of the Holy Spirit, and therefore
binding on all the Churches.

**The Responsibility of the
Local Church** It is the duty of
the local Church to protect
the True Faith and maintain
Christian morality. Taking this
as the starting point the Church
in the Second Century laid down
a definite period during which
the catechumen had to acquire
a knowledge of the Christian
Faith. After a strict supervision
and examination about his good
conduct and of the sincerity of
his intentions, he is presented to
the Bishop who examines him on
his knowledge of the Christian
Faith and on its Orthodoxy. If he
was accepted he was baptized and

became a living member of the Church, The learned Mor Iwanis Al-dari has explained in great detail the Rites of Admission of the Faithful to the bosom of the Church.⁶⁵

The local Churches have also preserved the traditions and the teachings of the Apostles which were verbally communicated to them. The Apostle Paul said, "Keep doing all things that you learned from me, and have been taught by me and have heard or seen that I do,"⁶⁶ and also, "The other matters I shall adjust when I come."⁶⁷ These "matters" refer to the Rites of the Church.⁶⁸ The Apostle John also says, "There are several things I have to tell you but I have thought it best not to trust them to paper and ink. I hope instead to visit you and talk to you personally, so that our joy may be complete."⁶⁹ As part of the protection of Christian morality the Church gave guidance to those who went astray and dismissed from Communion unrepentant sinners. It also laid down disciplinary and punitive laws against those who renounced their Faith but repented of it. It decided the duration of the penance and the moment of reconciliation as a loving and compassionate mother would treat her weaker children. By preserving its holiness both in Faith and conduct, the local Church has ensured the holiness

of the universal Church.

The Local Churches Today
By the middle of the 5th Century the Christian Churches had disintegrated and pride had overpowered the Communion in one Faith. The Kiss of Peace was replaced by accusations and insults between the Churches. And in this atmosphere of rivalry, hatred and disputation, the laws of the Church were trampled underfoot. The Churches began to pay more attention to quantity rather than quality with regard to the selection of its members. The test of the beliefs of the candidate for baptism was neglected. The Church then turned into a social organisation, sometimes quite remote from the Spirit of Christ. The local Churches which shared the same Faith gathered around the Apostolic Sees and accepted the authority and decisions of their local as well as general Councils.⁷⁰

The Lord whom all Churches praise has appealed to His Heavenly Father "May they all be one"⁷¹ in Faith, Mind and Spirit. This has stirred many hearts in modern times into seeking unity. Some ecumenical movements one can be proud of, but others are based on emotions, which is a great danger, for this could lead the Churches to bargain with their Faith for the sake of achieving a superficial social agreement which

definitely would be rejected by the Lord who said to the Pharisee, Blind Pharisee: Clean the inside of the cup and dish first so that the outside may become clean as well.”⁷² We cannot clean the inside of the cup and dish of our own Churches unless we humbly admit our faults and apply selfcriticism, and recognize one another because Christ recognizes all. This reminds me of what John said to the Lord, ‘John spoke up ‘Master’ he said We saw a man casting out devils in your name, and because he is not with us we tried to stop him.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘You must not stop him; anyone who is not against you is for you.’”⁷³ The first step therefore to be taken towards attracting the believers in Christ to the Communion of discipleship is not “to stop him; anyone who is not against you is with you.” The next step would be to study with him the question of discipleship and to try to win his confidence.

Lastly, he should be attracted to Communion in one Faith in Christ. The Fathers of the Syrian Orthodox Church have taught us to respect our brothers despite the differences in their beliefs. This is what our great guide Mar Gregory John Bar ‘Ebroyo (obit AD 1286) said to the hermits of all creeds and disciplines, “Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain

unseen.”⁷⁴ It is clear that this statement does not suit every faith, and that when we define Faith in a way peculiar to us as Monastics we say that Faith is the agreement in the intention to teach the Gospel. This is achieved through a verbal statement and by keeping the Commandments.

And since all contemporary Christians are agreed about the Statement of Faith which was decided at the Council of Nicea (AD 325) the Monastic should adhere to that alone. He should avoid disputes about the nature of persons. True Monastics discuss the way to behave only and do not discuss the subject of Faith at all.⁷⁵

This advice was addressed to the Monks of the 13th Century. If Bar ‘Ebroyo had lived in our age, an age of broadening horizons, he would have advised us to continue praying for one another and with each other in order to restore the unity of Faith between our Churches, so that the Church of Christ becomes one. He also would have advised us to read out what the Anglican Church calls the “Canon of Faith of the Apostles” which is a summary of the Canon of Faith of the Nicean Council. In this way, we can avoid the disputes about the content of Faith, regarding the effusion of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we can fulfil one of

the fundamental conditions of public worship, to worship with a common purpose, purity of heart and a strong faith. Let the relationship between our Churches today be based on mutual respect, co operation and the avoidance of disputes, hostilities and the enticing of individuals or groups. Only then will the atmosphere be suitable for discussing the content of Faith and for presenting the teachings which we received from our Fathers and which are universally regarded as evidence of the Apostles who had preached to our Fathers and established our Churches. Studying this evidence objectively would lead us to a better understanding of beliefs and to the Truth, and finally to the Communion of Faith, "there will be one Flock and one Shepherd."⁷⁶

The quotations were taken from the Jerusalem Bible.

1. Acts 11:26.
2. Matt. 16:28.
3. Acts 2:47.
4. Acts 20:28.
5. Matt. 18:17.
6. Col. 4:15.
7. I Thess. 2:14.
8. Rom. 16:16.
9. I Cor. 14:33.
10. Acts 8:1.
11. Gal. 1:2.
12. I Cor. 16:19.

13. I Cor. 3:16 & 6:19.

14. I Cor. 12: 12-20.

15. My book in Arabic *The Seven Sacraments* written in collaboration with the Very Rev. Isaac Sakka; published in Baghdad 1970, p. 93.

16. Phil. 2:1 & II Cor. 13:14.

17. Acts 2:44-45 & 5:1-11.

18. Col. 1:12 & Rom. 11:23 & II Pet. 1:4.

19. Heb. 12:23.

20. Eph. 4:4-6.

21. *The Seven Sacraments*, p.8.

22. I Cor. 12:13.

23. I Cor. 10:16-17.

24. Luke 22:19.

25. I Cor. 1:10-13.

26. John 10:16.

27. Refer to Acts 4:32 & Eph. 4:1-3 and also I Pet. 3:8 & Gal. 1:8.

28. Matt. 28:19.

29. Mark 16:15.

30. Acts 1:8.

31. Rom. 1:8.

32. Eph. 5:25-26.

33. Col. 1:21-22.

34. I Cor. 1:2.

35. Matt. 5:48.

36. John 17:17 & 20.

37. Matt. 13:30.

38. Eph. 2:20.

39. Matt. 28:18-20 & Compare with Mark 3:15 and Matt. 13:11 &

Mark 4:11 and John 17:19-24; also Matt. 19:28 & 18:18.

40. Refer to Matt. 10:14-15, 19:28; and also John 14: 1-3 & Luke 22:29-30.

41. Luke 10:16.

42. I Cor. 4:1 & 2 Cor. 5:20.

43. Acts 1:24.

44. *The Seven Sacraments*, p. 147.

45. II Tim. 1:6 & I Tim 5:22.

46. Titus 1:5.

47. Acts 15: 28-29.

48. Acts 1:17.

49. II Tim. 2:2.

50. My lecture "The Reception of Councils" delivered in Vienna on September 5th, 1973, and published in "Wort und Wahrheit" No. 2, Review, Dec. 1974, pp. 85-94.

51. *Al-Boorban Al-Gati* written by Al-Barmoosy (Bishop of Esodorus) Egypt 1893, p. 26.

52. Ibid, p.25.

53. *Al-Morid Al-'Atbb* by Patriarch Ephrem Barsoum, Homs, 1953, pp. 222-331.

54. The quote is a translation from the Arabic of *Al-Wad Al-Ilabi Fe Ta'sees 41 Kaneesa* by The Patriarch of the Catholic Copts, Egypt, 1925, Vol III, p.30, and the *Patriarchs of the Orient (Batarikat Al-Sharq)*, by Patriarch Yacoub III, Damascus, 1969, p. 8., where His

Holiness says about this Canon that it was one of the Canons forged by Zosimus of Rome (AD 418), who attributed it to the Council of Nicea in order to establish his presidency. He sent the claim to the African Council held in Carthage and which consisted of 217 Bishops, but they refuted his claim.

55. Gal. 2:9.

56. *Al-Boorhan Al-Gate*, p. 46.

57. Acts 8:14.

58. Acts 11:22.

59. Acts 15.

60. Canons 36 & 38 of the laws of the Apostles and 5 of the laws of the Council of Nicea, and 20 of the laws of the Council of Antioch.

61. Mujaz Tareekb Al-Masibiya, *A Summary of the History of Christianity* by Yasstoss al Doorri, Egypt, 1949, Vol. III, p. 68.

62. *Al-Rudud Al Orthozoksiya, The Orthodox Replies* by Archdeacon of St. Peter's Church, Egypt, 1935.

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6 THE ANGELS: AN INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation and in all the important events in it, we read about spiritual beings called angels. Those angels witnessed the creation of man, accompanied him in his glory and humiliation, in his rise and fall and in his sinfulness and righteousness. They escorted the Lord God along the way towards redemption.

Nature of Angels The angels are heavenly, articulate spiritual beings possessing intellect. They were created by God Almighty at the beginning of creation for glorifying the Lord, praising and ministering to Him as can be inferred from God's words to his servant Job: "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth...? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7).

Appearance The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the angels saying: "Are they not all ministering spirits?" (Heb. 1:14). "Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." (Heb. 1:7, Ps. 104:4).

It is believed that they are pure incorporeal souls. It is also believed that even though they are spirits,

they possess gentle, invisible, aerial body with no ordinary human needs. "The countenance" of the angel, who rolled back the stone from the door of the Lord's grave after His Resurrection "was like lightning and his raiment white as snow." (Matt. 28-3). The angels mentioned, however, in the Bible, appearing with sundry bodies and various forms, possess temporary bodies assumed to reassure people and encourage them to talk to them. Apostle Paul says of these bodies: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, the first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also which are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." (I Cor. 15:44-50).

Jesus Christ describes the pious believers who are to inherit his eternal heavenly kingdom, saying: "But they, which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." (Lk. 20:35-36).

Number Angels are not born. They neither marry nor are given in marriage. They do not procreate or become old, nor do they die. Their abode is heaven. They are sent as messengers to earth for ministering to mankind. God created them in great numbers that only God Almighty knows of. The Psalmist said: "The chariots of God are twenty thousand." (Ps. 68:17).

Elisha, the prophet said to his servant who was scared when he beheld the huge number of his enemies: "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw. And, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." (II Kings 6:16-17).

Daniel the prophet said: "I

beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool. His throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him.

Thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him." (Dan. 7:9-10).

The Lord Jesus said to His disciple Simon Peter: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). And the author of Revelation said: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne... and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands... (Rev. 5:11).

Church Fathers, therefore, deduced that the number of angels was so huge and it outnumbered that of human beings and all other beings over all the ages.

Power, Ability, Function Angels outdo human beings in knowledge, learning, power and ability. Due to the perfection of their nature, they are capable of predicting future inevitable events. They have extensive wisdom but are not omniscient.

God alone is omniscient. The

Psalmist said in his exaltation of the Creator: "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor." (Ps. 8:4&5). The Psalmist addresses the angels saying: "Bless the Lord, ye His angels, which excel in strength, who do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word". (Ps. 103:20).

Angels worship God, prostrate in adoration of Him and keep, as it were, praising Him day and night. They are always ready to fulfill His will and His commandments. It is through the angels that God, the invisible, gets in contact with man. "No man has seen God at anytime" (Jn. 1:18). And God's angels are standing before Him at all times. Their faces are covered with their wings, the way they were beheld by Prophet Isaiah (Is. 6:1-4). God sends angels to our earth for taking care of the believers, meeting their needs, guarding and rescuing them from their spiritual or corporal enemies. The Psalmist addresses the believers, saying: "For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone". (Ps. 91:11-13) and "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7).

The Holy Bible is full of services done by the angels to mankind in fulfillment of God's Commands. When God drove man out of the Garden of Eden "He placed Cherubim to keep the way of the tree of life." (Gen. 3:24).

The power of angels and their authority, which is derived from God, is manifested here. "When the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it" (II Sam. 24-16), and in (II Kg. 19:35) "the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred four score and five thousand."

The Lord God invested the angels with uthority to control material elements, manage and guard them, yet God never permitted them to change laws or principles set by God, neither did God permit them a change any procedures without His consent.

No material or human obstacles, no natural forces or laws can stand in the way of the fulfillment of tasks assigned to angels by God. The Lord sent His angel to his servants Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and delivered them from the fiery furnace in Babylon (Dan. 3:25-28) by making the fire have no power to burn. God also delivered His servant Daniel from the lions' den: "My God has sent His angel and has shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me for as

much as before him innocence was found in me.” (Dan. 6:22).

In the New Testament we read in Acts of the Apostles how the Jewish high priest and the Sadducees laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison and how the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison door and brought them forth, saying: “Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” (Acts 5:19- 20).

When King Herod laid hand on the Apostle Peter, he put him in prison and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him... Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains. “And the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him and a light shined in the prison; and he smote Peter on the side and raised him up, saying: “Arise up quickly.” And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, “Gird thyself and bind on thy sandals.” And so he did. And he saith unto him, “Cast thy garment about thee and follow me.” And he went out and followed him, and wish not that it was true which was done by the angel but thought he saw a vision. When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate which leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of its own accord; and they went out and

passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said: “Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:1-11).

The Guardian Angel God’s providence and His love of mankind willed that He assign an angel for every believer to guard his soul and body and be with him from his conception in his mother’s womb until his soul departs his body, when his spirit returns to God, its creator. Some believe that the child, while still in his mother’s womb, is guarded by his mother’s guardian angel. The minute the baby is born, a guardian angel is assigned to him.

The guardian angel accompanies the believer in this life and carries his prayer to God. He intercedes with God Almighty for him. The guardian angel guides the believer along paths of righteousness to fulfill God’s will and avoid thus paths of perdition.

Heaven is the guardian angel’s abode. He is capable, however, of hurrying to earth in no time to accomplish his assignment. Had it been possible to attribute human emotions, such as joy and grief, to angels, we would have felt their sympathies with human beings throughout the fluctuating

conditions of their life. The Lord said: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repenteth." (Lk. 15:10). Angels try to keep the believers away from sin. They fight evil spirits for them and protect them from the temptations of the devil and from disasters and calamities caused by him. Angels do that by praying for the believers. The Lord Jesus says: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. For I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 18:10).

The doctrine of having a guardian angel assigned for each believer was among doctrines of the Old Testament. Thus we read about Jacob, the father of the tribe, blessing the two sons of Joseph, saying: "The angel which I have deemed me from all evil, bless ye lads" (Gen. 48:16). The author of Ecclesiastes reported: "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh sin, neither say thou before the angel that it was an error." (Ec. 5:6). The guardian angel remains with the believer until his soul leaves his body. Angels carry the souls of the righteous, ascending with them to heaven.

According to the Lord's words in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus "the beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom." (Lk. 16:22).

The angels admit virtuous spirits to paradise to join the spirits of the righteous, where they wait for the Lord's Second Coming to be joined to their bodies and to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Some theologians suggest that the souls of evil people are usually carried, after departing their bodies, by the devils into dark places where they wait for the agony of doomsday when they will be judged and will suffer eternal punishment. Other theologians, however, state that only good angels are entitled to carry the souls of the righteous and the evil either to heaven or to darkness.

The Appearance of Angels and the Heralding of God's Commands and Warnings The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews reported: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:13-14). Throughout their ministry, angels appeared in diverse forms and conveyed various messages to mankind. Three angels appeared to Abraham that were substantial men to whom Abraham offered butter, milk and the calf, which he had prepared. "And he stood by them under the tree and they did eat... and one of the angels said to him, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life, and lo, Sarah, thy wife shall have a son." (Gen. 18:1-10) And this was fulfilled.

Two angels came to Lot, and he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread. They ordered him to leave Sodom because God would rain upon it brimstone and fire. (Gen. 19:1-3). The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says: "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:2).

So interesting are the narratives which tell of the appearance of the angels to men.

One is that of the vision of Jacob who dreamt and beheld a ladder set upon the earth and reaching to heaven, upon which he saw the angels of God ascending and descending. (Gen. 28:12) Another is the narrative of Jacob's struggle with the angel of the Lord and Jacob's triumph over him. Also, the narrative of the angel who prevented Balaam, son of Beor, from cursing those blessed by God, and how the mouth of Balaam's donkey was opened. (Num. 22:23-24). One of the significant appearances of angels is that of the archangel Gabriel to Daniel the prophet, when he told him of the future of his people and the coming of the Messiah, fixing the date of the coming of this great redeemer five hundred years in advance (Dan. 8:16; 9:21).

We know through the conversation which takes place between the archangel and Daniel, the prophet, that an angel

is appointed for every people and every city (Dan. 10:13,20). Five hundred years after his appearance to Daniel, Gabriel himself appeared to Zachariah, the priest in the temple of incense and told him of the birth of his son, John the Baptist. Gabriel likewise appeared to the Virgin Mary in Nazareth and told her of her divine conception of the Holy Spirit and of her giving birth to the Savior, Lord Jesus, who would absolve His people of their sins.

It was Gabriel who appeared to Joseph, who was betrothed to the Virgin Mary, and ordered him to take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt because Herod was seeking to kill the Boy.

The angels ministered to the Lord Jesus in the wilderness after His fasting, baptism and temptation. The angels appeared to the Lord Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane before His Passion, strengthening Him. It was an angel who rolled back the stone from the grave of the Lord and sat upon it after the Resurrection of the Lord from the dead, and he told the women of the Redeemer's Resurrection. (Matt. 28:2).

The angels have been and will remain forever at the service of the saints, encouraging confessors and martyrs to adhere to and be steadfast in their confession.

Ranking of Angels Angels:

exist in an orderly arrangement according to standing and function. They are divided into organized groups, ranks and status. Based on the teachings of the Holy Bible and ecclesiastic tradition, the Holy Fathers had nine names given to three ranks of them: high, middle and low.

The first rank includes the cherubim (Gen. 3:23-24), the seraphim (Is. 6:1-4) and thrones (Col. 1:14-16). The second rank includes authorities, principalities and dominions (I Pet. 3:22) and the third rank includes powers, archangels and angels. These three ranks refer to the three Christian ranks of priesthood which are episcopacy, priesthood and diaconate.

In his book entitled *Al-Rutba Al-Samawiya and Al-Rutba Al-Kanasiya* (Heavenly and Ecclesiastic Ranking) Iwannis of Dara (+860) states the following: Articulate beings are two: angels and humans. Angels are spiritual and so is their priesthood, which is purely spiritual and transcends this world. As angels undergo no change in terms of age and do not experience youth and old age, therefore their priesthood shall have to be static, having no increase, decrease or change. Nor do they move from one rank to another. Human beings, however, are tied to their ever changing body, which grows, matures, becomes old and

then dies. As such, they have been granted the type of priesthood which is appropriate to them”.

Name of Some Angels In the Bible only four archangels of the highest rank are mentioned: 1. Gabriel whose name means God's mightiness and power (Dn. 8:1,21). He is the angel who said of himself: "I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God." (Lk. 1:19). He is the messenger of the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption.

2. Michael (Dn. 10:13) whose name means one who resembles God. He is the archangel who will call the dead in Christ to rise (I Thess. 4:15).

3. Raphael whose name means the light of God (Tobit 12:19).

4. Uriel (II Ezra 4.10).

Wicked Angels - Falling into Sin Angels possess free will. They were led into temptation. Some of them committed the sin of rebellion and offence against God. Angels who were steadfast in their commitment to God Almighty, were called holy angels or the chosen angels because God, the omniscient, knew that they would be firm in obeying Him. The other angels, however, who were disdainfully proud and rebellious, fell with their chief to Hades and were called evil angels. Their job is to fight ferociously against people, do mischief to them and tempt them.

They are like the good angels,

organized hierarchically. Isaiah the Prophet referred to the event of the fall of evil angels saying: "How art thou fallen from Heaven, O Lucifer, Son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I'll be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit." (Is. 14:12-15).

In the Epistle of Jude we read about the Lord's punishment of rebellious angels. "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6). And the Apostle Peter says: "For if God spared not the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment." (II Peter 2:4).

A great number of angels of all ranks and estates are fallen angels. Their prince is called Satan, which means tempter, complainer, deceiver, and an accuser. He wanted to be equal to God according to Isaiah the Prophet (Is. 14:12). He is called Lucifer, that is adversary, rebellious and insurgent. So many

attributes were given to him, some of which are Ekron's god, Baal-Zebub, who is originally the greatest god of the Philistines (II Kings 1:2), the wicked, and Belial, the prince of this world, the prince who dominates the firmament. He is a killer, a liar, the originator of hypocrisy and the father of the serpent and the dragon.

Demons have much of what is true of angels for they are incorporeal beings endowed with power, intelligence and ability.

Such characteristics will turn into evil once the angel falls, and as such will be committed to do evil. Evil angels hate man because he gained favor with God, Who created him to be a rational being. He granted him dominance over all creatures, hence Satan's temptation of man with the help of the serpent in the Garden of Eden and man's fall into sin.

Ever since the fall of man into sin, God put enmity between the woman's seed and the serpent's soul, that is Satan. This enmity is a grace of God bestowed on man because through this enmity the evil intentions of Satan towards humanity were revealed and God declared Satan as an exposed enemy, eager to disguise in order to destroy mankind. The war between man and Satan has never ceased. The Apostle Paul says, therefore: "For we wrestle not

against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:12).

Number The number of devils is huge. They attack man in great numbers as reported in the incident of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac of whom the evil spirit was taken out by the Lord. When the Lord asked him what his name was, he answered. “My name is Legion: for we are many.” (Mark 5:9). The term legion means an army unit consisting of as many as six thousand soldiers. This refers to this one man having been the victim of six thousand demon possessions. And forthwith, the Lord gave them leave and the unclean spirits went out and entered into the herd of swine and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea and were drowned.

Power Devils have great and powerful material and immaterial power. The difference in their power is manifested in the influence they exercise on the kinds of people and in the ways of mischief and elusiveness they adopt for leading man into sin and for causing destruction in the world. They differ in ranks and positions. The Lord says: “When the unclean spirit is gone out of man, he walketh through dry

places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first” (Lk. 11:24-26). The Lord also said about one class of demons or about demons in general: “Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting?” (Matt. 17:21).

Devils possess power which enables them to do great wonders, such as making fire come down from heaven. (Rev. 13:13, 16:14).

Satan helps his followers: sorcerers, soothsayers and others, to do miracles and predict the future, or what we call witchcraft and divination. These activities include necromancy, which is in fact consulting Satan himself, as Satan has no authority over the soul of the dead. It is Satan who talks on behalf of the soul, imitating the person, depending on his previous familiarity with him. God condemns magic with all its demonic activities because it is a sin and a practice of Satan.

The power of Satan is doubled through his misleading schemes. He tries to hide and disguise, beguiling men into thinking that he does not exist. Demons in fact

are spiritual beings, each of whom has an existing "self".

When Jesus Christ healed those who were possessed with devils, He used to command each as an individual being, and an essential self, to come out of a person and never return (Matt. 4:24, Mk. 1:32).

The Lord triumphed over Satan when he tried to tempt him in the wilderness. God gave us power to be triumphant in our Lord Jesus Christ and commended us to pray to the Father, saying "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." (Matt. 6:13). The Lord annihilated the power of Satan exercised on us by his Holy Cross. The moment we draw the sign of the Cross on our foreheads, demons run away scared and frightened. The Lord says: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Lk. 10:18) and he said before His Passion: "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." (Jn. 12:31).

These devils are to undergo everlasting agonies on doomsday. The author of Revelation saw them defeated and wrote of them saying: "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; the dragon fought and his angels prevailed not; neither was their place found anymore in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent

called the Devil, and Satan who deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God, day and night.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death. (Rev. 12:7-11).

Conclusion

We are surrounded by spiritual beings. They are chosen angels, who are holy spirits; and evil angels, who are evil spirits or devils and demons. The latter are our archenemies and the enemies of the entire human race.

The Apostle Paul warns us saying: "Your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour. Who resist steadfast." (I Pet. 5:8-9) Devils are incapable of subduing us and making us fall into sin no matter how powerful they are.

They can only beguile us so that we commit sin of our own free will.

Thanks are due to God Who out of His abundant mercy and providential care, has assigned a guardian angel for each one of us.

This angel accompanies us throughout life, inspires us to be virtuous, guides us towards holiness, offers our prayers before the throne of God and intercedes with God Almighty, for us. We must all have to abide by the guidance of our guardian angel and honor him. However, we should not worship him because the worship of angels is deemed a blasphemy according to the Apostle Paul, who says "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels." (Col. 2:18).

In Revelation, John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him and the angel said to him: "See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: Worship God." (Rev. 19:10)

The Church keeps commemoration days of some of the angels, honoring them as saints. Let us, therefore, also honor them, hoping that we shall join them and be just like them, the inheritors of Christ's kingdom of heaven forever.

7

MONASTIC LIFE IN THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

Introduction

We call the monastic life a philosophy of Christian law and character. It is a way of abandoning worldly life. It is filled with yearning to attain life hereafter. In the monastic life, acts countenanced and proscribed in the world are to be avoided; the desires of the flesh are to be disciplined; all wanton impulses are to be checked, everything that cannot be brought into harmony with the true Christian faith is to be avoided.

The Eremitic Life Monastic life began with individuals seeking seclusion for the purpose of praying to God. It was individual self denial. Each ascetic sought a life separated from society. Where possible he took his abode far from human settlements where he could come closer to God through prayer and fasting in his quest for eternal life.

Cenobitism The eremitic setting developed into a spiritual community life as groups of ascetics came together under

the leadership of a spiritual experienced leader or father in order to be initiated into the practice of the true ascetic life. At a later date monasteries were built to house the monastic community.

They were headed by a father or abbot with a great deal of experience in monastic and ascetic living. This type of monastic life was called cenobitism.

Rules were set and internal orders for the monasteries were elaborated to regulate the spiritual life of the community among monks and their relationship with the abbot of the monastery. These rules also governed relations between his representatives and assistants, the wise and venerable scholars who initiated the novices into monastic living by instructing and watching over them.

Despite the existence of these monasteries, the anchoritic way of life persisted. Ascetics and hermits took their abode in caves and in hermitages. Many of them spent the weekdays in seclusion. On

Monday mornings they gathered in monasteries to celebrate the Mass with their brothers and the abbot, participate with them in the Eucharistic meal, then return to their habitations.

Monastic life in the Pre-Christian Religions In the pre-Christian religions, there were a lack of practices resembling Christian asceticism and monastic life, such as fasting, prayer, and exhausting the body through hard physical labor to discipline bodily desires and to check wanton impulses in an effort to attain enlightenment of the spirit.

However, these practices are not removed from the spirit of piety in which the Christian monk strives to live a perfect life in accordance with the Gospel. For the monk subjects his body to such hardships, he does so not for the sake of torment but in order to master his body, to give the spirit room to develop, to practice a virtuous life and to acquire good character. It is therefore erroneous to see the origins of Christian monastic life in pre-Christian religions such as that of ancient Egypt, in Buddhism or even Jainism.

Asceticism in the Old Testament However, it cannot be denied that the prophet Elijah mentioned in the Old Testament was a model for the anchorites who

withdrew from the world with all its temptations.

We read how God commanded him: "*Leave this place and turn eastward; and go into hiding in the ravine of Kerith east of the Jordan river. You shall drink from the river, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there.*" He did as the Lord had told him; he went and stayed on the bank of the river of Kerith east of Jordan, and the ravens brought him bread and meat morning and evening, and he drank from the river" (1 Kings 17:2-6).

John the Baptist, too, lived the life of an ascetic. He grew up in the desert: "*John was dressed in a rough coat of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he fed on locusts and wild honey*" (Mark 1:6).

The Origins of Christian Monastic Life The fundamental tenets of Christian monastic life are based on the imitation of the life of Christ on Earth and on obedience to his sublime teachings. Our Lord Jesus withdrew into the solitude of the desert and fasted there for forty days and forty nights. We are told: "*He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him*" (Acts 10:38). And he chose to live in poverty. The apostle Paul writes: "*For you know how generous our Lord Jesus Christ has been; he was rich, yet for your sake he became*

poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). And he had no abode.

On one occasion a scribe came to Jesus and said: "Master, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have their holes, the birds their roosts; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:19-20). And his disciples gathered alms to satisfy his and their own material needs. When he sent them out to preach the Gospel, he commanded them: "Go and proclaim the message: The Kingdom of Heaven is upon you.

Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out devils. You received without cost; give without charge. Provide no gold, silver, or copper to fill your purse, no pack for the road, no second coat, no shoes, no stick, the worker earns his keep" (Matthew 10:7-10).

This divine command constitutes the basis for the vow of voluntary poverty which the monk takes. Celibacy, however, has its origin in the teaching of Christ: "...For while some are incapable of marriage because they were born so, or were made to by men, there are others who have themselves renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Let those accept it who can" (Matthew 19:12). The apostles thus recognized the true meaning of chastity and the advantages it has over marriage. On this subject the apostle Paul

wrote to the Corinthians: "Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord — how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world — how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world — how she may please her husband" (1 Corinthians 7:32-34).

In Christianity, monastic life arose as a necessary consequence of following the teachings of Christ. The goal was to attain Christian perfection through self-denial. In the imitation of Christ one sought to come closer to God and to keep to his path, devoting one's entire being to this aim. The Holy Cross was borne, and strict obedience was to be given to the divine command which He gave to the man who came to Jesus and asked what good works he could do to attain eternal life. Jesus answered him, saying: "If you wish to go the whole way, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and then you will have riches in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). The monastic life was to be guided in all things by the words Jesus Christ spoke to His disciples: "If anyone

ishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me.

Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of his true self? Or what can he give that will buy that self back? For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will give each man the due reward for what he has done" (Mt 16:24-27). Jesus also said: "I tell you this: there is no one who has given up home, brothers or sisters, mother, father or children, or land, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much - houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and land - and persecutions besides; and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

The Real Motives for Those Who Seek Monastic Life In the first chapter of his book *The Book of the Dove*, Bar Haebraeus (1286) stated the reasons for a human being to seek a life in seclusion from the world: "A man withdraws from the world and its temptations for two reasons; the first and principal of these is Divine inspiration that arises in a person's thinking, which arouses him from slumber to confront him day and night with the suffering that awaits sinners in the hereafter and with the

eternal life that is promised to the just in the Kingdom of Heaven. This happens but seldom and is granted only to a few at different places and at different times.

The second reason, by contrast, is unreal and worthy reproach, arising from the desire of human beings for futile glory, a desire that comes upon a man, urging him to attain his goal through the arduous practice of asceticism.

Some wealthy people, however, have sought to attain glory by spending large amounts of money. This has occurred everywhere and with great frequency. Although such conduct is to be rejected, it ought not to be dismissed outright, for there are many seeds that fall to the ground by chance and which bring forth good fruit, and others that are sown with great effort and which bear no fruit."

Monastic Vows True monastic life is obedience to a hidden call from God. The monk gives proof of his devout purpose in his quest for Christian perfection in the endeavor to bring his will into unison with the will of God. Through penance he attains the state of grace, of righteousness, of sanctification, and of communion with God by acting in accordance with the will of God and not according to his own will. He withdraws from the world. The pious monk seeks to achieve this observing three vows, which he

makes publicly by his own free will. These vows are the following:

1. Absolute obedience to his spiritual superior.

2. Voluntary poverty, signifying that he may take nothing from the world as his personal property.

3. Celibacy, enjoining him never to marry and to remain chaste. These vows are faithful promises that the monk must keep to the end of his life. Moreover, the sum of his vows and promises constitutes a covenant between God and the monk which binds him for his entire life, and the breach of which places him in danger of eternal damnation. Besides these three vows there are Christian duties enjoined on the monk, like prayer, fasting and the giving of alms. He must give alms from the little money he saves from the sale of wares made to earn his living. The monk must keep long vigil at night, be reserved and indulge in no idle talk.

As we have mentioned above, a person might devote himself to the monastic life for a mundane and not divine reason, for the sake of transitory glory. The spiritual scholars advise that this ought not to be rejected out of hand, since a person may set out with such an aim nevertheless attain the love of God.

They include those who

withdraw into the desert to escape a martyr's death and human tyranny. But, they continue their ascetic practices like fasting, prayer, and nocturnal vigils. Some of them thus attain the perfection of a true Christian and are a good example to others.

Factors Contributing to the Flowering and Spread of Monastic Life The decree issued by the Emperor Constantine the Great in Milan in 313 contributed to the flourishing of monastic life in the 4th century, which is also referred to as the century of monastic life. Through this decree Christianity, for the first time in history, was recognized as a religion enjoying the same legal rights as other religions.

Emperor Constantine's next step was to free unmarried people and childless married couples from the heavy poll taxes that had been imposed on them. It was said that many people abandoned their families and fled into the desert to avoid paying this tax. In addition, monks could no longer be conscripted for military service. Such measures encouraged thousands of young men to seek monastic life, to submit to the duties and rules of the monastic life, and thus to lead a simple life in complete reclusion from the world.

In their cells many of them brought forth rich spiritual fruits

hanks to those who instructed them in the spiritual life. They distanced themselves from material, everyday life, achieving greater independence from bodily needs and worldly-intellectual influences. Neoplatonic philosophy, which influenced some of the ascetic church fathers helped to bring monastic life to fruition.

Who is the True Monk?

The monastic life is a state of constant penance. That monk acquires the qualities of loving kindness and of resisting evil is the best evidence of his devout resolve to take his place in the blessed life of a monastic order.

He might come to have doubts about the step he has taken and to consider returning to society. But if he resists this temptation and submits to the duties of monastic life by living in obedience to his spiritual mentors he will overcome this challenge. Even if his vocation is not from God, his constant prayer and the fulfillment of his duties will make it a divine one.

The tenacious struggle of the monk against the devil and his snares is a constant and relentless one. But, the love of the monk for God is mightier than life and death. For with Christ he has crucified the temptations of the flesh, he has taken upon himself the cross of Christ, which is the

sign of departure from this world. He accepts abuse and revilement for Christ's sake in order to live with Christ. In the words of Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ: the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me"* (Galatians 2:19-20).

Therefore, nothing can separate the monk from the love of Jesus: *"For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths — nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:38-39).

The monk also heeds the counsel of the wise Solomon, through whom God said: *"My son, mark my words, and accept my guidance with a will."* (Proverbs 23:26) And, on this subject St. Mushe Bar Kepho advises the monk: *"My son, if you have devoted yourself entirely to the love and fear of God, hesitate no longer, fight with great courage and be a great warrior who enters the arena to destroy his enemies."*

The Spiritual Struggle of the Monk Saint Aphrem (373) describes the philosophy of the monastic way in a precious Syriac poem in which he portrays how he trained his soul through privation

and the hardships of life and prepared it for the struggle against the temptations of the flesh:

1. Many times have I suffered hunger and my body has called for nourishment, I have abstained to become worthy of the blessedness that those who fast attain.

2. My body, made of dust, sought to still its thirst, but I spurned it in wrath that it might become worthy to savor the dew of the Kingdom of God.

3. And when in my youth and in my old age my body sought to tempt me, I chastened it day after day to the end.

4. On the morning of each day I thought that I would die in the evening. And like a man who cannot escape death I attended to the labors of the day without trepidation or tedium.

5. Each evening I imagined that the next morning I would no longer be alive. So I arose and prayed to God and worshipped him until the rising of the sun.

6. When my body pleaded for the sleep I sorely needed, I lured it with the blessedness that God bestows on those who keep vigil.

7. I have built a church in my soul, and I have offered up to the Lord the travail of my body as incense and fragrance.

8. My spirit became the altar, my will the priest, and like a lamb

without blemish I sacrifice myself.

9. Lord, I have borne your yoke from youth to old age, and I have worshipped you constantly to the end of my days, I have spared no pain nor suffered tedium.

10. I have borne the sufferings of hunger and overcome them, for I have seen you taste bitterness between the two bandits for the sake of my redemption.

11. I have ignored the torments of thirst because I have seen my Lord drink vinegar from the sponge for my sins.

12. Food was of no significance for me, I disdained wine, for my eyes were upon the banquet of your kingdom, O heavenly bridegroom! In this manner monks vanquished the passions of the flesh so as to be able to bear the hardships of life, the bitterness of asceticism and the severity of the rules. They kept vigil by night fasting and praying, they performed heavy manual labor in their quest for the pure life. The divine light was cast upon them from on high; some among them who attained perfection in their asceticism even achieved the stage of union with His glory.

Saint Anthony (356) — the Father of Monks — summed up his philosophy of asceticism in this phrase: “The soul is whole when the sensual pleasures of the flesh are abated.” And this is what the Apostle Paul meant when he

wrote: "...for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Saint Athanasius (373) wrote of Saint Anthony: "He kept watch long into the night, so that often he spent the whole night in prayer without sleeping. This happened not on only one occasion but frequently, so that the other monks wondered about it. He wore a robe of hair and in his entire ascetic life bathed not once in water. During the day he ate only once, but often only every second or fourth day. He ate only bread with salt and drank water. He was satisfied with a hard mat to sleep on, but usually slept on the bare ground."

The Institution of Cenobiticism and its Organization Monastic life was known in Christianity from the 2nd century AD, as mentioned by Bar Hebraeus. In the 3rd century AD many ascetics, worshippers, and hermits appeared in many places subject to the See of Antioch.

Saint Anthony (251-356) is regarded as the founder of monastic life. He was called the "father of monastic life" and "star of the desert." And, Saint Paul of Thebes was considered the first anchorite. Before he died, Anthony was inspired by God to visit him and he told him the story of his life.

Saint Paul of Thebes also told him that the hour of his death was nigh, and that God had sent him

to bury him. Saint Paul of Thebes lived to the age of 113 years, 90 of which he spent in the eastern desert of Egypt, which he had chosen to be his abode. His daily meal consisted of half a loaf of bread which was brought to him, like to the great prophet Elijah, by a raven.

With the flowering of monastic life and the spread of monasteries in Egypt, Saint Pachomius wrote the rules for cenobitic life, regulating all the spiritual, bodily, and social needs of the monks.

The Syrian Monasteries From the beginning of the 4th century, many famous monasteries were founded throughout the lands under the jurisdiction of the See of Antioch, that is to say in Syria, Mesopotamia, on the southern coast of Palestine, in the Syrian desert, at Mount Edessa, at Mount Izla, which surveys Nisibis and Tur-Abdin, and in Qardu and Al-Faf close to Mosul. They became centers of learning and of the virtuous life; thousands of monks and nuns withdrew into them from the worldly life in their quest for the Kingdom of God. The fragrance of their virtue wafted gloriously from their monasteries, caves hermitages and cells.

Sozomen, the Egyptian chronicler (432 AD), reports of 30 ascetics inhabiting the steppes of northern and central Syria,

whom he maintains had surpassed the Egyptian ascetics in practices. The figure given by Sozomen represents only the chosen few who attained fame through their ascetic life. There were thousands of other monks and nuns living in the monasteries of these regions.

Monastic Ordination is not Priestly Ordination On this subject Bar Hebraeus writes: *“Monastic ordination does not bestow the rank of priest, since the monk ranks below a deacon.”* He continues: *“The monk is not permitted to approach the altar nor to touch the sacraments. The monk Dimathilius was strongly rebuked by Dionysios the Great because he had dared to do so.”*

Although monastic life arose outside the church it is a force that supports the church.

For monks and nuns live not for the redemption of their own souls alone, which is their mission, but the pastoral and spiritual well-being of the population is also their concern. They have prayed day and night for the church and the world, so that the light of faith has been shed upon all humanity.

They have borne the light of the Gospel to many regions of the Earth. As the bearers of knowledge they have led humanity from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge, thereby doing them a great service.

Monastic Life in the Service of the Church In hard times the anchorites abandoned their cells and monasteries and went into the cities to aid the faithful and to confirm them in their religion, to help them bear oppression with patience and in steadfast faith. When heresy arose, they departed to preach to the faithful and to preserve them from the mistaken beliefs of the heretics and to give them a firm hold in the orthodox faith that was entrusted to them by the holy apostles and the church.

Saint Anthony — the father of monks and the star of the desert — acted thus and determined not to abandon his connections with the church. His cooperation with the church was a good example for monks to emulate. During the wave of oppression that was instigated by Maximinus (305-318), he left his cell and went to Alexandria with the intention of suffering a martyr's death for the sake of Christ. There he visited the persecuted faithful prisoners, comforting them and encouraging them to remain firm in their faith unto death. When the followers of Arius killed the church fathers and believers in a great wave of persecution, Saint Anthony visited Alexandria a second time in 355 to defend the true faith, to comfort the persecuted faithful, to visit the prisoners and to exhort them to remain firm in their faith.

This brought him much suffering. Saint Ephrem the Syrian for his part founded a church choir composed of young girls from Edessa, which sang works that he had both written and put to music, and which served to strengthen Christian doctrine and refute heresy. The beginnings of orderly liturgical life in the Syrian Church is regarded as being his work.

It should also be mentioned that when famine broke out in Edessa in the winter of 372/373, when many of the inhabitants died of hunger, Saint Ephrem visited wealthy citizens of the city, collected alms from them and distributed them among the poor.

Furthermore, he established houses in which he set up 1300 beds. They served as hostels for the old and infirm under his personal care.

When the plague broke out, Saint Ephrem undertook the care and comfort of the patients himself until he, too, fell victim to the plague, dying on the 9th of June 373.

The Worthy Status of Monastic Life in the Church
Although monastic life arose outside the church, it became a significant force together with the church and within the church. It is more than prayer, fasting, the practice of asceticism and keeping vigil. It is more than knowledge

and learning. It is an important element of the church that combines the spirit of asceticism with mysticism. In the eyes of society, the monk is thus the bearer of sublime tidings — the teachings of the Gospel — which he lives in truth, practices in perfection and offers as an example to humanity.

For this reason the faithful have had confidence in the monks. And monastic life has accordingly occupied a privileged and special position in the church. The church has recognized monastic life and has chosen its bishops and sometimes the patriarchs from among the monks.

It is thus still a tradition in the Syrian Orthodox Church to select bishops from among the ranks of monks. Patriarchs and bishops, after election as spiritual fathers and leaders, continue to live as monks as if still living in their monasteries. Saint Jacob, Bishop of Nisibis, the teacher of Saint Ephrem is said to have worn a goatskin robe, and to have prayed, fasted and kept vigil by night.

Thus monastic life has performed an invaluable service for the church. Moreover, the development of the church is bound up with the flowering of monastic life. As Saint Athanasius wrote: "If monastic life and the priestly ministry grow weak, the entire church weakens."

The monasteries have been beacons of religion, learning and knowledge and a lasting token of culture and civilization. Monks and nuns have offered a good example for all mankind. The daily life of the monks has been a clear demonstration of the true promise of Christ to all whose work is hard, whose load is heavy, for he will give them relief if they follow him and bend their necks to his yoke and learn from him to be gentle and humble-hearted, for his yoke is good to bear, his load is light (Matthew 11:30). His divine instructions, which are the instructions of perfection in the Christian life, have been put into practice by monks and nuns. They were happy on earth and have entered the Kingdom of Heaven, for they have worshipped God in spirit and in truth, and they have deepened knowledge of religion and of the world, doing humanity a great service.

The monasteries were established in the mountains and on the banks of rivers. They resembled institutions of higher learning, usually possessing a library. There were also a number of schools headed by monks. These schools, like those in Nisibis and Edessa, were attended by monks from monasteries and hermitages. In the 4th century the school of Nisibis was famous. It retained its importance up to the 7th century.

It produced Saint Jacob (338), who was succeeded by his genial disciple St. Ephrem (373). People came to this school in search of knowledge from southern Mesopotamia, then under Persian rule, and when in 363 Nisibis fell to the Persians, St. Ephrem accompanied by a number of teachers, also left the school. They went to Edessa, where St. Ephrem took over the directorship of the school there. It had been founded as long ago as the 2nd century by the kings of the Abgar dynasty. When St. Ephrem took over the school, its importance grew still further. There were innumerable monasteries at Edessa housing many monks and offering many cells for their abode. St. Ephrem occupied a cell there, practicing the ascetic life, interpreting Holy Scripture, composing poetry and hymns and teaching in the school, as well as instructing young girls in church music. In 373 he was called to the Lord.

In his book *The Scattered Pearls: History of Syriac Learning and Literature*, the great scholar Patriarch Ephrem I Barsaum (1957) writes: "83 monasteries have been counted that were important centers of higher learning since the advent of Christianity. Only ruins remain of some of them. But, despite the campaigns of destruction and persecution their inhabitants have suffered, other monasteries have remained steadfast."

The monasteries have given the church and the world outstanding scholars who have produced great works. Their pens have given birth to famous works in the fields of theology, philosophy, languages and other disciplines and branches of knowledge.

Although many of their valuable works have been lost, many renowned libraries are proud of what they possess in the way of Syriac manuscripts.

We will mention some examples of these famous monasteries, making reference to a number of sources, the most important of which is *The Scattered Pearls: History of Syriac Learning and Literature* by the scholar and Patriarch Ephrem I Barsaum:*

1. The Qenneschrin Monastery was dedicated to the Apostle Thomas. It was situated on the eastern bank of the Euphrates in Syria, opposite the city of Hierapolis (Garablus).

Founded in about 530, it was able to devote itself to scholarly pursuits more than all the other places of learning. Its fame spread across all borders and until the early 9th century it had the largest school of theology and science. At the time it had more than 300 monks. It produced 7 patriarchs — one of whom was Patriarch

Athanasius Al-Jammal (631) — and 15 bishops. It was inhabited until the early 13th century. One of the famous scholars to study there was Severus Sebocht (667), a great philosopher, who has bequeathed outstanding works of philosophy and astronomy to us. Through his mediation Indian numerals were transmitted to the Arabs.

2. The Qarqaphto Monastery was founded by St. Schemu'n. It was situated between Ras-Alain and Hassake in Syria close to the village of Al-Magdal on the banks of the river Khabur. It was famous in the early 8th century for its activities in the field of linguists. The monks of this monastery gained fame in the field of the vocalization of Holy Scripture. It produced 6 bishops and was occupied until the early 10th century.

3. The St. Barsoum Monastery was first mentioned in the 8th century. It was built on the mountain close to Melitene in Turkey. It was the residence of the patriarch from the 11th to the end of the 13th century. It produced 5 patriarchs and 34 bishops. It was inhabited until the 17th century. Among the famous sons of this monastery were Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi (1171), Metropolitan of Amid (Diyarbakir), Mor Michael the Great (1199), and

*This book is available in English with the grogias Press,. NJ, USA and in Malayalam with Mor Adai Study Centre.

Mor Gregarious Abu Al-Faraj (1286), known as Bar Hebraeus. It possessed a well-stocked library containing numerous manuscripts in the Syriac script Estrangelo.

4. The St. Zakai Monastery was near Ar- Raqqah in Syria. St. Johanon of Talo (538) was ordained monk here in 508. It also produced the Patriarch Johanon IV and 20 bishops. It once gave shelter to the caliph Harun ar-Rashid, who liked it very much there and consequently honored its inhabitants.

5. The Baared Monastery was in the district of Melitene. It was founded in the 10th century by the Patriarch Johanon VII. It produced one patriarch, one maphrian and 18 bishops and metropolitans. It served as a place of learning until 1243. In that year Turkomen killed 15 of its monks, most of whom were scholars.

Monasteries Still Inhabited and Active Today

1. The St. Hananyo Monastery (Dayr az-Zafaran) is situated to the east of the city of Mardin in Turkey, and was built in the early 6th century of the foundations of a citadel. It became well-known from the end of the 8th century. From 1293 it was the residence of the patriarchs for more than 600 years. It produced 21 patriarchs, nine maphrians and 110 bishops. It is still inhabited, and houses a

religious primary school under the supervision of a number of monks.

2. The St. Gabriel or Qartomin Monastery lies east of Midyat and is the most famous monastery in Tur-Abdin. The two ascetics Mor Samuel and Mor Schemu'n built it in 397. It became the principal residence of the bishops from 615 to 1049. Mor Gabriel (667) resided as bishop there in the 7th century and the monastery was later named after him. It produced four patriarchs as well as one maphrian and 8 bishops. Among them was the Patriarch Theodosius (887 - 895) who had a distinguished reputation in the field of medicine and wrote a book bearing his name.

The monks of this monastery were well known for manufacturing parchment. They also distinguished themselves in the copying of manuscripts and the renaissance of the Estrangelo script under the leadership of Metropolitan Johanon in 988. To this day, the monastery houses monks and nuns and runs an important school.

3. The Monastery of Mark the Evangelist is also referred to as the Monastery of the Mother of God in Jerusalem. According to a Syriac inscription found on the wall of the church in 1940, the institution was founded in the 5th or 6th century. It is the upper room in

which the Lord partook of the Last Supper with his disciples. It is now the See of our Metropolitan and since 1472 has been the residence of our monks in Jerusalem. It has produced nine metropolitans.

4. St. Matthew's Monastery is east of Mosul at the foot of Mount Faf. It is a large monastery, founded in the late 4th century and the residence of a metropolitan since that time. In its first period it housed a large population of monks. It has suffered many troubles. In 1845 it was renovated and restored. It has produced three patriarchs, six maphrians and 24 bishops. It is still inhabited and, as we have mentioned, is the seat of a metropolitan.

5. The Syrian Monastery in Egypt is located in the Egyptian countryside between Cairo and Alexandria. It was probably built in the 5th century. A Syrian tradesman named Morutho of Magrith bought it in the mid-6th century and donated it to the Syrian monks. In 1084 there were 10 monks living in the monastery. It was occupied until the mid-17th century and is now inhabited by Coptic monks.

Monastic life in our Syrian Church Today The Syrian Church has experienced various forms of oppression, especially since the beginning of the present millennium. The internal schisms

caused by changing currents within tribes and clans have also weakened it.

Furthermore, first the Roman Catholic Church and later the Protestant Church have sought to reduce the stronghold of the Oriental Churches, of which our Syrian Church is one. They isolated sections of the faithful, bringing them under their influence by exploiting the political influence of foreign countries and the ignorance of local rulers.

This has led in particular to a weakening of the influence exercised by our clergy. Our Church has nowhere sought the protection of a foreign power, for it believes that God alone is its protector. These compelling factors have weakened monastic life and, as the Fathers wrote, when monastic life is weakened, the church will also be weak.

Today the church is aware that renewal and awakening is imperative, and for this reason it has encouraged its children to dedicate themselves to the church and to become monks and join the communities of our monasteries. The church has devoted particular care to the St. Ephrem Seminary, which was founded in Zahle, Lebanon in the 1930's by the Patriarch Ephrem I Barsaum. It was later moved to Mosul in Iraq, then returned to Lebanon.

It subsequently closed down for a period until we reopened it in Damascus. It has produced and will continue to produce monks who are aware of their responsibilities and who are willing to make sacrifices in the effort to revive the church. We endeavor to send some of the graduates to theological colleges abroad to complete their university education.

At present we have ten monks studying at the University of Athens, six in Rome, and others at various higher educational institutions in Europe and the United States. We have also established the monastic life of Jacob Baradaeus for nuns and have sent two of them to Thessaloniki, Greece for higher studies.

Through the grace of God, we have had a new building constructed for the St. Ephrem Seminary in Ma'rat Saidnaya, 25 kilometers away from Damascus. We have given this building the name St. Ephrem Clerical Monastery. It will also be a center for Syriac studies, a center for Syrian youth from around the world and an ecumenical center.

We encourage our spiritual sons, the Syrian clergy to seek cooperation with all Christian churches to attain, God willing, unity among Christians.

We thus endeavor through the grace of God to foster spiritual leadership in the church by strengthening monastic life. We are preparing for the coming of the third millennium in the ambition of following the example of our forefathers, who despite persecution and many hardships have borne the light of the Holy Gospel throughout the world.

It should also be mentioned that we have two schools in the Mor Gabriel Monastery and in the Dayr al-Zafran Monastery as well as a theological school in Mosul, Iraq and a theological faculty in India. And because Syrians like the monastic way, they have, through the efforts of their honored Metropolitan Julius Cicek, founded a St. Ephrem Monastery in the Netherlands. They have acquired a monastery here in Germany and another in Switzerland. It is our hope that Syrian monastic life will flourish everywhere in the world where Syrians live.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for your kind attention and I would especially like to thank the Theological Seminary of the University of Heidelberg for inviting me to give this lecture. God bless you.

Patriarchal Journal, vol. 87-89
(September-November 1990).

FASTING: A DEFINITION

Fasting is a voluntary act of abandoning worldly life. It is a sign of man's obedience to, and respect of God's laws and his observance of God's ordinances.

Fasting is observed in two ways: by voluntary abstinence from food or drink for a specific period of time and by eating light, small and fat free meals, consisting of cereals, beans, fruits and vegetable oils. A person who fasts refrains from eating meat and animal products except for fish and all seafood and honey because bees are insects without fleshly desires.

Grades The learned Bar Ebroyo (+1286) states: "Fasting has three degrees: general, special and exclusive." One may practise general fasting by either refraining completely from eating or drinking during daytime, in the evening eating cereals and beans, or by refraining from eating meat and animal products during the day. This type of fasting has its own laws and regulations for so many people might refrain from eating without the intention of practising fasting. As such, they would not be considered as fasting. Special

fasting is that type practised by recluses.

Exclusive fasting is that practised by the perfect, who couple their abstinence from food and the indulgence of senses with purification of soul and refraining from evil thoughts. The only condition requested for such a type of fasting is the eradication of every mundane thought which might exist deep down in one's heart. Although this grade of fasting is very difficult to attain, yet it can be achieved so easily through training as the saying goes: With the least granted, we might be content. We are the masters of our desires.

Objectives The main objectives of fasting are the weakening of the lust of the flesh, training the will to control whims and giving the spirit the precious opportunity to transcend mundane desires and be elevated above worldly desires into heavenly thoughts for attaining purification, and being cleansed and becoming able to express the spirit's love of God, Almighty manifesting thus its preference

of spiritual life to physical one, making the spirit triumphant over the flesh. The Apostle Paul says in this context: "This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." (Gal. 5:16-17). He also states: "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live." (Rom. 8:13). The psalmist says: "I humbled my soul with fasting." (Ps. 35:13). Humbling the soul is the mourning mentioned by the Lord when, defining fasting to the disciples of John. He says: "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matt. 9:15). Humbleness and mourning are one and the same thing, being the evident sign of true repentance, the ultimate goal of fasting. They form one of the conditions of true fasting deemed acceptable to God.

It is not only the body which fasts by abstaining from food or drink but the soul as well by keeping away from sin. Both flesh and soul avoid the motives leading to it. This can be deduced from the Lord's command in the mouth of Prophet Joel who says: "Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping,

and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments: and turn unto the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful." (Joel 2:12).

Exemption from Fasting
Fasting is imposed on the faithful who are adults and healthy. The elderly, children, babies, sick people, nursing, postpartum and pregnant women are exempted for necessity.

Fasting in the Old Testament
God Almighty, imposed fasting on the first man when He commanded him in the Garden of Eden saying "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 16:17).

Adam's failure to keep God's command and obey Him by abstaining from eating from the forbidden fruit resulted in his expulsion from the Garden of Eden and in being sent to the land of suffering and torment. Needless to say that the food of the first man was free of meat and limited to cereals, beans and fruits in the Garden of Eden. This is supported by God's address to Adam and Eve: "Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, to you it shall be for your meal." (Gen. 1:29). It was only after the flood that God permitted man, represented by

oah, to eat meat. (Gen. 9:3).

The Patriarchs, the Prophets, the righteous and the pious of the Old Testament observed fasting with the aim of gaining God's favor through faith and good deeds.

According to the Bible and prior to the giving of God's commandments, Moses ate neither bread nor drank water for forty days. (Ex. 34:28). It is also reported that Prophet Elijah, in fulfillment of God's command, "did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meal forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." (I Kings 19:8). The Prophet Daniel abstained from eating meat and drinking wine, saying: "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth." (Dan.10:2-3). Based on the story of Daniel and his friends, we know that they ate just vegetables and refused to defile themselves with the portion of the king's meat. (Dan. 1:8-17) and as such set a model for those who eat only seeds, beans and fruits while fasting. God commanded the Prophet Ezekiel: "Take thou also unto thee wheat, and barley, and beans, and lentils, and millet, and fitches, and put them in one vessel, and make thee bread thereof, according to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon thy side, three hundred and ninety days shalt thou eat thereof. And thy meat which thou shalt eat shall

be by weight, thou shall drink also water by measure." (Ezek 4:9).

Fasting for Repentance When the Prophet Jonah warned the people of Nineveh according to the word of the Lord, he stated: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. (Jn. 3:1-10).

Canonical Fasts The people of Israel observed fasting throughout their generations especially with the aim of repentance and turning

back to God. God enjoined fasts on them on various occasions through His Prophets and Saints. The book of Leviticus records the Lord saying: "And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord" (Lev. 16:29-30). And in the Book of Prophet Zechariah the Lord says: "The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace." (Zech. 8:19).

True Fasting Coupled with Mercy

The concept of true fasting accepted by God in the Old Testament can be illustrated by God through Prophet Isaiah's words: "Is not this the fast that I have chosen to loosen the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from

thine own flesh? (Isa. 58:6-7).

Fasting Twice a Week

The Lord Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the publican illustrates that a good Jew fasts on Monday and Thursday every week (Lk. 18:10-14).

Patriarchs Enjoin Fasts

At times of crises leaders of the people of the Old Testament enjoined fasts on their people as did Ezra who said: "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance... So we fasted and besought our God for this, and he was entreated of us." (Ezra 8:21-23). The Holy Book also reports that a seven-day fast was enjoined on the children of Israel as a sign of mourning for the death of King Saul and his sons (II Sam. 31:13).

Special Fasts

David the Prophet fasted and afflicted himself before God in hope that his son might be cured (II Sam. 2:21). Just like David, special fasts were voluntarily enjoined now and then by individuals and groups on themselves in seeking God's mercy on them and for delivering them from temptations.

Fasting in Christianity

In the New Testament, it was

the Lord Jesus Who set the law of fasting in Christianity when He fasted forty days and forty nights (Matt. 4:2). "He did eat nothing, and when they were ended, he afterward hungered." (Lk. 4:2). The Lord Jesus was not in need of fasting but fasted to set us an example. He imposed fasting on us to show us its powerful spiritual impact especially when coupled with prayer.

Fasting coupled with prayer will, therefore, be an effective spiritual weapon that will destroy Satan and his troops, our spiritual enemies. The Lord revealed this to us when He said: "How be it this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. 17-21).

The Lord said in answer to the question of John's disciples, who wondered why His disciples did not fast, "Can the children of the bride chamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast in those days." (Matt. 9:14-15; Luke 5:35). The Lord's words were deemed as an authorization. He vested his disciples to set dates for fasting. Accordingly, the Holy Apostles and the righteous disciples started fasting after the Lord's Ascension to heaven. They fasted on diverse occasions and in different ways. In the Acts of the Apostles we read the following

about them: "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.' And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3). The Apostle Paul prides himself on keeping the practice of fasting by saying: "But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in labors, in watchings, in fastings." (II Cor. 6:4-5).

The Lord Jesus, glory be to Him, Who authorized His Holy Apostles to practise fasting when the heavenly bridegroom would be taken away, that is after His ascension to heaven, did also authorize them, by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, to consecrate Sunday instead of the Jewish Saturday and to elect bishops, priests and deacons. He also authorized them to establish the rites of their ordination, that is their consecration by laying hands on them.

In addition, His Holy Spirit He poured out His Holy Spirit on them at Pentecost, inspired them to arrange the rites and do the service of His Holy Sacraments that are necessary for the economy of His Church.

The Lord had illustrated the best way practised in the fasting approved by God. He warned His disciples, saying: "When ye fast,

be not as the hypocrites of a sad countenance for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast but unto thy Father which is in secret and thy Father Who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:16-18). “When ye fast” is a reference of the Lord to fasting prescribed under the law. The Lord does not mean by that, that one has the full freedom to adhere to the practice of fasting or to refuse it. His words “When thou prayest” (Matt. 6:5) would otherwise have meant that one is free to be committed to praying or not and that there should be no places for worship, no congregational prayer, no call for prayer or specific hours for praying.

Christ instituted the principle of fasting and praying and vested the Church with authority to regulate dates and times convenient for the believers to practise them.

Special fasts are those enjoined by man on himself as for strengthening his piety in exactly the same way he says his individual private prayer for himself. In his Epistle to the Colossians, Apostle Paul said: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days,

which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.” (Col. 2:16-18).

The Apostle Paul does warn the believers against the shadows of Jews and against a group of converts to Christianity who were still adherent to Jewish principles and who did not recognize the decision of the First Jerusalem Council held in AD 51, which declared that the believers need not be committed to circumcision or any other Jewish principles. He focused on “abstaining from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from blood.” (Acts 15:20).

The Apostle Paul, while commending married couples to keep spousal rights, stated that the married couples should not copulate during fasting days, saying: “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.” (I Cor. 7:5).

Some people object to practising fasting, arguing that fasting is against the Lord’s will Who says: “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man;

but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." (Matt. 15:11). It is quite clear that the Lord does not mean to say that we should not fast, for He is the one Who set us the example of true fasting which is approved by God. In fact, He aimed at refuting the objections of the Pharisees when they beheld the Lord's disciples eating without washing their hands according to the Pharisees ritual rinsing which they considered as compulsory for cleansing a man before eating. No matter how clean one's hands might be, one shall have to practise these formality rites in order to be cleansed. They also had their own special way of washing food, which would be considered defiled if this ritualistic way of washing was not applied. The Lord Jesus refuted their empty views and showed them the importance of purity of heart, saying: "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which comes out of the mouth that defileth a man (Matt. 15:11). This means that it is the sinful thoughts and filthy words which come out of the heart of a sinful man that defile man.

Fasting, therefore, is a divine prescription and a heavenly providence practised by the Lord Jesus Himself, Who taught us to adhere to it. He vested His Holy Apostles with authority to set dates for it and illustrate ways of

practising it, through which the believers can best express their faith in God, their adherence to his offices and their preference of soul to the body and angelic life to materialistic life of the world.

Order of Fasts in the New Testament The Lord Jesus instituted the law of Fasting which was handed over to the Apostles as a spiritual principle. Setting occasions of fasting, duration and the way of practising it, were all entrusted to the Church to be in charge of. This was based on the spiritual authority the Lord has given to the Church when He addressed His Holy Apostles saying: "He that heareth you heareth Me, and He that despiseth you despiseth Me, and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." (Luke 10:16); and when He said: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church: but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever, ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on

earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 18:15-18).

The Lord, His name may be glorified, said to St. Peter, the chief of the Apostles: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 16:19). By virtue of this spiritual authority vested in the Church by the Lord, general canonical fasts were arranged which people and clergy were obliged to observe. They were held sinful if they refused to abide by them since listening to the commands of the Church meant obeying God. Rebellion against the Church’s commands is deemed a rebellion against the Lord.

Ever since the dawn of Christianity, both clergy and laity practised fasting, abstaining from food or drink for a period of time set by the Church. It also has meant abstinence from eating meat and animal products during fasting. All Apostolic Churches throughout the world have agreed to sanctify the principles of fasting and have always considered it a divine requirement and a holy duty.

Easter Fast The first fast instituted by the Church was the Easter fast, also called the Passion Fast. During this period, the believers abstain from eating

and drinking from Good Friday, the day of the Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion and death through Easter morning in sympathy with the life-giving Passion undergone by our Lord Jesus Christ for our sake and for the salvation of humanity in fulfillment of St. Paul’s words: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection.” (Rom. 6:3,4).

The Church used to practise this fast and celebrate the commemoration of Lord Jesus’ Passion and His Resurrection once every thirty three years. The Church, however, started celebrating this fast annually due to the fact that a lot of people were born and died without having had the chance of witnessing this commemorative observance. Four days were eventually added to the beginning of this fast to form one whole week, called Passion Week, during which people would abstain from eating or drinking until late afternoon and would breakfast by eating just bread and drinking salty water.

Nowadays people abstain from eating till noon or the afternoon and then eat, fasting food free from meat and animal products consisting of cereals, beans and fruits. People abstained even from eating sweets in sympathy with the Passion of the Redeemer Who was given, when thirsty, vinegar mixed with gall.

Lent (40 days Fasting) It was in the third century AD that Lent was instituted. The Fast of Passion Week, practised a long time earlier, was added to it in the second quarter of the fourth century. With the addition of Passion Week, Lent, therefore, lasted seven weeks. Lent was enjoined on the faithful as a reminder of the struggle of the Lord Jesus and of His fasting in the wilderness.

The Lord, Who is in no need for fasting, started His public divine economy in the flesh by fasting. "He fasted forty days and forty nights. He was afterwards hungered." (Matt. 4:2). He did this in order to teach us the practice of fasting and the spiritual struggle against Satan. He triumphed over Satan, the tempter, and endowed us with the power to defeat Satan in the name of the Lord.

Moreover, He revealed to us the mystery of spiritual triumph saying: "How be it this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." (Matt. 17:21).

The faithful used to practise Lent by abstaining from eating and drinking until the afternoon, then they would eat just bread, beans, cereals, fruits and vegetable oils and drink salted water. During Lent they used to give alms to the poor. In the fourth century, St. Ephrem, the Syrian (+373) said in reference to this:

"Oh faithful, fast during Lent and give your bread to the poor as alms. Pray seven times daily as taught by David, the Prophet, the son of Jesse." Ecclesiastical laws stipulated that all the faithful should observe Holy Lent. Strict church sentences were imposed on clergy and laity who violated these laws.

No fast practised by abstinence from food and drink is allowed on Saturdays and Sundays. On these two days the Holy Liturgy is usually celebrated and after the Holy Liturgy the abstainer usually eats fasting food. In this context the teachings of the Apostles stipulated the following: "Every clergy who fasts on Sunday or Saturday, except for the Saturday of Light, shall be divested of his rank, and every layman shall be excommunicated." In his book "*The Dove*", written for the benefit of monks and hermits who had no guides, the scholar Bar 'Ebroyo (+1286) stated: "Fasting shall not be observed on Saturdays and Sundays in compliance with laws."

In sanctification of Sunday, our Holy Syrian Church does not start any fast on a Sunday. In the event of such coincidence, fasting starts on Monday morning in honor of Lord's day and consequently the number of fasting days will be one day less that year.

No wedding festivities were permitted during Lent pursuant to a decision taken by the Council of Laodicea in 364. That Council prohibited also the celebration of the Holy Liturgy and of the commemoration of martyrs on any day in Lent other than Saturdays and Sundays.

During Lent, the celebration of the Holy Liturgy was replaced by the celebration of the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy, introduced to our Church by Patriarch Mor Severus the Great (+538) early in the sixth century. During Lent the Holy Liturgy is celebrated only on Saturdays and Sundays, except for Mid Lent and the 40th Friday of Lent, Maundy Thursday, and Saturday of Lights. In the event of having Annunciation day falling during Lent, the Holy Liturgy is usually celebrated on that day even if it falls on Good Friday. The faithful eat fasting food after the Liturgy.

The fifth canon of Bar 'Ebroyo's *Nomocanon*, first section, chapter five, stipulates the following: "The Church celebrates

the Annunciation day whatever day it may fall" as it is the basis of all the Lord's days. Accordingly, no shifting of Holy Days is ever allowed. In respect of fasting on Good Friday or the Saturday of Light, the believers refrain from food or drink on those two days and say the prayer assigned for those days. In the event that the Presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Temple falls on Monday of Lent, which scarcely happens, then the Holy Liturgy shall be celebrated.

This took place in 1915 and will also take place in 2010. In such a case, the Liturgy of the commemorative day shall be celebrated as usual in the morning. The prayer said for fasting shall be recited at noon. The faithful will then stop his or her abstinence from eating. The prayer of forgiveness (*shubkono*) is postponed till the next morning. The Church prohibited drinking wine and all alcoholic drinks during fasts. The Holy Church's objective of devoting days for fasting is not to prohibit eating certain kinds of food and allow others. It rather aims at subjugating the will of the faithful to God Almighty through chastity and practice of sublime virtues, especially the virtue of obedience to God's commands as articulated by His ministering servants, the bishops of the Church who were vested with the authority

to loosen and bind, to enact laws and set acts and ordinances for the benefit of the faithful and for the glorification of God's Holy Name.

The Church is a kind mother and a good teacher and as such does not lay on the shoulders of the faithful burdens too heavy to bear in observance of God's words: "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! For ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." (Lk. 11:46). Based on this concept the late Patriarch Elias III of blessed memory (+1932) permitted eating fish during Lent and allowed the faithful in America to fast only the first and last weeks of Lent in addition to Wednesdays and Fridays. He permitted the rest of Lent to be without fasting.

In response to the petition submitted by the Church of India, the late Patriarch Aphrem I Barsoum (+1957) of blessed memory, had similar steps taken in relevance to this in addition to shortening the periods of other fasts for all the faithful in 1946. In 1966 the late Patriarch Yacoub III of blessed Memory (+1980) permitted the clergy and laity to fast only the first and last weeks of Lent in addition to Wednesdays and Fridays, permitting them to eat other food during the rest of Lent. He also permitted having festivities, weddings, baptism, liturgies and commemorations on

all the days that fall between the two aforementioned weeks.

This tolerance shown by our predecessors, the blessed Patriarchs, towards the faithful by curtailing the period of fasting during Lent is but an expression of mercy lest the faithful, God forbid, might violate the law and be subject to God Almighty's wrath. Therefore, whoever benefits from this tolerance shall not be considered as sinful but as abiding by the law. Whoever fasts all the days of Lent, in addition to Passion Week, shall be doubly rewarded by God. Clergy of all hierarchical ranks, except for the sick and the elderly among them, must set a good example for the faithful and be their model in observance of the Lord's acts and His holy laws by being committed to fasting in Lent and during the life-giving Passion Week as practised by our Holy Forefathers. This can be achieved by abstaining from food and drink from midnight till after the next mid day. The faithful eat afterwards fasting food free of fat. This exemplary way of fasting is highly favored.

Twice a week fast, Wednesday and Friday

Ever since the end of the first century AD, the Holy Church instituted weekly fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays instead of the Monday and Thursday fast practised by pious Jews as

illustrated by the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Lk. 18:12).

Christians fast on Wednesday because it was on that day that the Jews plotted to arrest the Lord Jesus and kill Him. They fast on Friday because it is the day on which the Jews crucified the Lord Jesus and the day he died on the Cross for our salvation.

A reference to this fast is found in the book titled *The Teachings of the Apostles*, which dates back to the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century AD, and in the works of some Fathers of the first century AD. According to the Apostles' teachings both clergy and laity who fail to observe this fast shall be pronounced anathema and excommunicated.

It was the custom of the Church in early times not to have fasting observed on Wednesdays and Fridays which fall between Easter and Pentecost. Likewise in the event of having a feast day of the Lord, or a commemoration day of either the Virgin Mary or of a Patron Saint of the local church or of the region falling on either day. It was the custom of later generations to allow non-adherence to fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays falling between Christmas and Epiphany.

The faithful in our dioceses in Iraq do not fast on Fridays falling

between the Holy Fast of Nineveh and Holy Lent, which are the Friday of all priests, Friday of souls of alien faithful, and the Friday of souls of all faithful. Nowadays, the faithful fast on Wednesdays and Fridays by abstaining from eating till noon when they eat fasting food. Alternatively, they may have fasting food in the morning and at noon.

It is preferable that the faithful eat fasting food throughout Wednesdays and Fridays from the evening through the next evening, the way our forefathers practised fasting since the dawn of Christianity.

Christmas Fast

The institution of this fast was towards the beginning of the fourth century AD. This can be gathered from reading the poems of St. Ephrem the Syrian (+373) and the hymns he composed in the fourth century. Christmas Fast is practised in preparation for commemorating and welcoming the day of the Birth of Lord Jesus in the flesh and in memory of the grief brought by sin, which we experienced before the Lord's Birth, the darkness of ignorance, Satan's enslavement of us and the infliction of the created world in expectation of salvation accomplished through the birth of the Savior Who redeemed us by His incarnation. We practise this fast to become pure in our

souls and body and be worthy of welcoming the commemoration of the Redeemer's Birth, the Word of God incarnate, the way Moses fasted before the written word of God, that is the Law of the Old Testament was handed over to him.

Christmas fast used to last for forty days. The Church, however, shortened the period to twenty-five days. In 1946 and pursuant to a decision taken by the Synod held in Homs, the late Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum of blessed memory reduced it to ten days starting on December 15 and ending on Christmas Day, Dec. 25.

Fast of the Apostles

It was named as such out of the custom of calling something after the name of the one who instituted that thing. It is only God to Whom fasting is due. The practice of this fast means following in the footsteps of the Apostles (Heb. 13:7) who observed it in fulfillment of the Lord Jesus' words: "The days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them and then shall they fast." (Matt. 9:15). After the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, they started to fast. In reference to this the following is stated in the Acts of the Apostles: "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted." (Acts 13:2).

The duration of this fast differed in length based on the Julian Calendar of Easter. Starting accordingly on the next day after Pentecost and ending on the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul, the two chief Apostles. By virtue of a decision taken by the Synod of Homs in 1946, the duration of this fast was shortened to three days starting on June 26 and ending with the commemorative of the two chief Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul on June 29.

Fast of the Virgin Mary

We do practise this fast in preparation for the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and in following in her footsteps and those of the Holy Apostles who fasted at the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. This fast used to last for fifteen days, but pursuant to the decision taken by the Synod of Homs in 1946, it became five days starting on August 10 and ending on the Assumption Day of the Virgin Mary, August 15.

By virtue of the Patriarchal encyclical issued on December 7, 1946 by Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, of celebrated memory, the old periods of the Christmas fast, the Virgin Mary's Fast and Apostle' Fasts referred to in the Nomocanon of Bar 'Ebroyo were cancelled and substituted by new periods set by the Patriarch become the new law in force.

Nineveh's Fast

It was called after Nineveh because the Ninevites were the first to practise such a fast praying for God's mercy and forgiveness. This fast is practised following the example of the people of Nineveh of old times who hearkened to the warning of God through Prophet Jonah and proclaimed a fast enjoined on man and beast from the greatest to the least in supplication of God. And God relented from the disaster He said He would do unto them and he did it not. (Jon. 3:10).

This fast began to be practiced in our Church towards the fourth century A.D. This can be inferred from the writings of St. Ephrem the Syrian (+373) and the hymns he composed. This fast used to last for six days, but now is only for three days starting on the third Monday which precedes Lent. It had been neglected through the ages. Mor Dionysius Bar Salibi (+1171) states that Mor Marutha of Tikrit (+649) was the one who enjoined it on the Church of the East first in the region of Nineveh. Bar 'Ebroyo-quoting others-states that the confirmation of this fast was due to the crises the Church went through in Hirat. The people there

fasted three days and three nights, praying constantly in fulfillment of the command of their bishop, and they were rescued from the ordeal by God.

The Armenians embraced this practice of the Syrians, calling it Sourp Sarkis. The Copts did the same during the reign of the sixtysecond Patriarch of Alexandria, Abba Abram the Syrian. This fast is highly favored among faithful. Some faithful abstain from food and drink throughout the three days, receiving Holy Communion on the third day and continuing to eat fasting food until Thursday morning. The rest of the faithful abstain from having food till noon or till late afternoon and afterwards eat fasting food. Prayers which are sung to melodies of Lent usually accompany fasting. In the event of having the Presentation of the Lord Jesus in the Temple, which we usually celebrate on February 2nd, during this fast it is mandatory that we observe the feast celebrating the Holy Liturgy in the morning as usual. The prayers of Nineveh's Fast are then said at noon.

Abstinence from food ends directly after the Liturgy by eating fasting food.

9

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

The Role of Women is a topic of importance today in our Syriac Orthodox Church which is a deeply rooted traditional apostolic church." In our presentation, we shall depend upon the Holy Scripture and the tradition of the Church, namely the teachings of the Apostles which have not been recorded in the Scriptures. We also shall depend on the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils and general and local synods, as well as on liturgical practices and the teachings of our Holy Church Fathers, which have all been passed down to us from our predecessors.

Depending on the Holy Bible, the Syrian Orthodox Church considers women equal to men in rights and duties. According to the Holy Scriptures, God created man in His image; "in the image of God created him; male and female He created them." Consequently, men and women are equal before God because God's ideal plan for marriage is one man for one woman and one woman for one man. In reference to their union

in matrimony, the Holy Scripture says: "And they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24, Mt.19:5, Mk. 10:8, and Eph. 5:31). This is Adam, the first man from whom God took a rib and created Eve to be a helper for him. "And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man;" (Gen. 2:23). They were both created in the image and likeness of God; the image of God which is the soul God gave to man when he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul. Hence, the living soul gave Adam life through union with the dust.

The image of God in man is also the image of mind and conscience, the power of creativity and dominance over other creatures. God endowed man with this power when He created him as holy, granting him dominance over the living creatures. Man was one, "male and female He created them" and dominance was granted to both of them, but when they both sinned they lost the grace of

holiness. Jesus Christ, however, redeemed us by His atoning death, restoring the image of holiness equally to both men and women.

God Almighty spoke equally of men and women in the Old Testament, saying in the fifth Commandment: "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12) and in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon said: "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck.

When thou goes, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee" (Prov. 6:20).

It is the Hebrew Fathers who distorted the concept of God's Commandments by their teachings which were so alien to the divine law. The Lord Jesus addressed Jews in this context, saying unto them: "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, "Honor thy Father and Mother: and He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, whosoever shall say to his father or his mother. It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition" (Mt. 15:3-6).

The Virgin Mary, The New Eve

Indeed, our Lord Jesus Christ held women in high esteem in the person of the Virgin Mary, for He chose her to be His Mother because of her chastity and godliness so that she deserved that the Holy Spirit descend on her, purify her, absolve her from sin and sanctify her. Through the descent of the Holy Spirit, she conceived in her womb the Divine Fire, thus giving birth to the Divine Son, the Lord Incarnate. We call her Theotokos (*Yoldath Aloho*), which means the Mother of God who gave birth to God Incarnate.

Although the Virgin Mary restored the early status of Eve, which she had lost after her fall, she never obtained the grace of priesthood. She ranked, however, high above prophets, clergy, martyrs, confessors, apostles and evangelists; for she was the one who informed the Apostles of what had happened to her since Gabriel's annunciation of the divine conception. The Virgin Mary was the first to evangelize the Good News of Christ and to believe in His divine power. We consider her to be above the prophets. She prophesied about herself, saying: "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His Name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him

from generation to generation” (Lk. 1:48-50).

Jesus Christ honored his mother, the Virgin Mary while He was a child, and took care of her, providing for her sustenance in His adulthood after the death of Joseph who was betrothed to her. He also honored women in general, having sympathized with the sinful Samaritan woman who was demeaned by her people. Jesus talked to her when Hebrew rabbis abstained from talking to a woman in the street, albeit she was next of kin to them. The Lord Jesus sympathized also with the sinful woman whom the Pharisees wanted to stone to death and He absolved her. Jesus Christ did this at a time Jews looked down upon women. When we read about the miracle of feeding five thousand men with five loaves of bread and two fish, recorded by Apostle Matthew in the Holy Gospel, saying: “And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children” (Mt. 14:21), we do gather from the terminology used among Jews at that time that it was man who was important, whereas women and children were equally demeaned in status.

Women and Jesus

“The Lord Jesus, however, showed His divine care for women. Some women walked with Him,

serving Him and His disciples. Jesus was the friend of Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus” (John 11:5). It is noteworthy to mention here that women were loyal to Jesus Christ. They followed Him on His way to Golgotha. They bewailed and lamented Him. They grieved when they beheld Him crucified, suffering and in agony.

They heard Him commend His mother, the Virgin Mary, to the care of His beloved disciple, thus teaching every human being to honor their mothers and take care of them.

Women also followed Him to the new sepulcher where His Holy body was buried. They were the first to come early to the grave to embalm His Body. They were the first to see Him after the resurrection, and the first to profess his resurrection and proclaim it.

Women and The Apostles

Women helped the Apostles and Evangelists in preaching the Good Tidings. And in the Acts of the Apostles, we read about the four daughters of Philip who were virgins and who did prophesy (Acts 21:9). Philip, the Evangelist was one of the seven deacons. We also read Apostle Paul’s denouncement of the thoughts of those who protested against his accompanying a woman on his evangelical tours, saying: “Have we not power to lead about a sister, a

wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas" (I Cor 9:5)?

Furthermore, women play a significant role in the establishment of a family and in taking care of it, raising children and bringing them up. In relevance to this, the Apostle Paul says: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing" (I Tim 2:15)." By giving birth, he means both physical birth and the spiritual one from above. We can also see that this woman, who was ready to give a spiritual birth from above, was herself born from heaven. God Almighty created man as male and female, and made them equal in rights and duties, but He also recreated them anew from above at the time of redemption when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost in the Upper Room where there were 120 men and women. When Luke recorded this incident, he counted them all and not only men; therefore, he did not say apart from women when the Holy Spirit rested on all, on the Apostles, the disciples and on women simultaneously. The Virgin Mary, the Mother of God Incarnate, was in the lead among women who were there and they all, male and female, equally obtained the gifts of the sublime Holy Spirit.

Women in the Early Church

Prior to the descent of the Holy

Spirit, women were participating in the prayer with men in the Upper Room. They were all waiting expectantly for the coming of power from without, and the Holy Spirit rested upon women as He did upon the Apostles and all the disciples with no discrimination whatsoever between men and women. The Evangelist Luke describes this divine incident in the Acts of the Apostles, saying: "the number of names together were about a hundred and twenty, And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 1:15 and 2:1-4). The Holy Spirit prepared them all for proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel to the world. He preserved them from erring, reminding them of all that had been said by the Lord Jesus, so they adhered to His heavenly teachings and preached them to the world.

At this point we are undoubtedly bound to mention women believers who used to serve in the palaces of kings, great men, chiefs and noblemen; and to preach the Holy Gospel in word and indeed, especially through raising children and living a life of righteousness. Through these women, the Holy Gospel spread powerfully and gradually the way leaven produces fermentation in dough.

So peacefully, the Holy Gospel broke into strongholds of misleading and misled paganism and those of Judaism which perverted God's laws. Hence multitudes of both faiths believed in the Holy Gospel during the very early days of Christianity.

We, as a church, who have adhered to the Holy Gospel and the ecclesiastic and apostolic tradition, shall have to admit that God has bequeathed on some women the gifts of sublime spiritual leadership, which were clearly manifested in their lives throughout the ages.

It goes without saying that the history of the Syriac Orthodox Church abounds with the lives of such women. In the Syriac Church women enjoy great dignity due to the active role they have played in their service of the Church.

Helen, the Christian queen, who was the daughter of a Syriac priest, who lived near Edessa and brought up her son Constantine in a righteous way, vowed that if her son converted to Christianity, she would go to Jerusalem in search of the wood of the Cross. A vow she certainly kept.

Empress Theodora

It is mandatory that we mention Empress Theodora, the woman who symbolizes the glory of the Syriac Church and who rules over our hearts, coming second to

the Virgin Mary in status, dignity and honor. She was the wife of Emperor Justinian in the sixth century AD. This miraculous woman was the daughter of a Syriac priest of Mabbug in Syria.

We respect and honor Empress Theodora and bless her because she offered comfort to her spiritual fathers, the highly esteemed pontiffs of the Church, whom she highly respected and served at difficult and crucial times when the Byzantine Government used to persecute, displace, exile and kill them. The toll of this persecution was thousands of martyrs. Those who survived persecutions went through agonies and Theodora used to comfort and protect them. However, she could never bring this persecution, launched against them by Byzantium, to an end without paying a dear price. It was Theodora who was behind sending a mission to illuminate Ethiopia with the light of the Holy Gospel. And we shall never forget the nuns who took vows of celibacy, chastity, voluntary poverty and obedience, dedicating themselves to the service of the Holy Gospel throughout the ages.

This is what we gather from the patrimony of our Fathers, their traditions and honorable history. Indeed, the aforementioned women are not the only ones in the history of our Syriac Orthodox

Church. So many were the women who were well known for their wisdom, scrutiny and courage in professing their faith. Many of them obtained the laurels of martyrdom for the sake of Christ, and many others underwent persecutions and agonies and were listed among the confessors. Many women had an inborn wit like the Edessan woman whom St. Ephrem met along the banks of the Disan River in Edessa. The story goes that this woman kept glancing at him so he became angry and rebuked her, saying: "Woman, keep your eyes downward and look at the ground." To which she answered: "I am entitled to look at you, O man, because I was taken from you and you should look down to the earth as it was from earth you were created." St. Ephrem admired this woman's wisdom and said: "If this is the wisdom of the women of Edessa, what kind of wisdom would that of men be?"¹

Women and Saint Ephrem

In Edessa, where St. Ephrem came to settle after leaving Nisibis in 363 upon its occupation by the Persians, he sometimes lived an ascetic life on the Holy Mount of Edessa and other times taught in its famous school. He was interested in liturgical life, to which he introduced the special melodies of his rhymed hymns. He also started a church choir, including young Edessan girls to sing his melodies

and other spiritual poems and beautiful hymns which he adapted to teach the doctrines and faith of orthodoxy.

It is clear that St. Ephrem's establishment of a choir of young virgins exalted the status of women and has practically proved that when St. Paul wrote in his First Epistle to the Corinthians (14:34) "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak", he did so solely as a temporary organizational measure, not a doctrine of faith that should never be amended or changed, in order to prevent talkative women from prattling at a time others wished to pray piously before the Divine Glory.

St. Ephrem is doubtlessly considered a pioneer in having started a choir in Christianity. He attested that women like men have an equal right to praise God in public prayer. St. Paul, however, spoke of men and women as equals in the self-same Epistle to the Corinthians, saying: "Nevertheless, neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (I Cor 11:11).

The influence of St. Ephrem is clear in his education of women in Edessa by helping them understand the teachings of the of the Holy Gospel, adhere to Christian doctrine and endure

persecution courageously for the sake of faith.

All this is manifested in the incident of the woman from Edessa during the persecution launched by Wallis the Arian at the end of the fourth century, precisely in the year 373. Wallis had appointed an Arian bishop in Edessa, but this prelate was rejected by the faithful who consequently began to pray outside the city. One early Sunday morning all the faithful flocked to the outskirts of the city where soldiers started arresting them and throwing them into prisons. The governor of the city met one of the faithful while she was running to join the others, carrying her newborn baby. The governor stood in her way and stopped her, reminding her of the authorities' orders and the severe punishment awaiting whoever might violate these orders.

She expressed her willingness to endure agony for the sake of adhering to the Christian doctrine of faith. He went on and asked her: "We have come to know that you have left the door of your house wide open and you are running so fast carrying your newborn too. Why have you done this?" To which she answered: "As for the house, I am sure I am not returning to it. Concerning my newborn, it is because of my great love for him that I want him to share with me the honor of martyrdom

and to be joyfully with me in paradise, thus saving him from the condemnation which is the result of your perversity.

We can therefore gather that a faithful woman is worth of every honor bestowed upon her. Our Syrian Church is fully aware of women's credits and virtues and does highly acknowledge their true worth and dignity.

Syriac Woman, A Deaconess and a Presbytera

One of the practices inherited from our Fathers is the restriction of women from entering the sanctuary. Even baby girls are not allowed to enter the sanctuary after having been blessed by the sacrament of Holy Baptism. A baby girl is not allowed to be carried in a procession inside the sanctuary as is a little boy. One of the reasons behind this practice might be the tendency to preserve the good reputation of Christianity which it was accused of during the early days of its history of being an erotic religion.

Another reason for such a practice might be the fear of falling in sin as a result of having the two sexes within the sanctuary, especially as pagan priestesses used to sell their bodies with the aim of raising money for their pagan temple.

Allocation of two separate places in the church for men and

women, separated by a wooden partition, was an established practice inherited from church tradition. Reference to this practice can be inferred from one of the Homilies of John Chrysostom (+407). The impact of this practice was apparent in some of our ancient churches.

St. Jacob of Sarug (+521), the saintly scholar of our Church, justifies the nonadmittance of women to the sanctuary in one of his verses (memres) in which he says through the mouth of Adam in teaching his children:² I would not send weeded wheat³ as an offering to the Lord with the hands of Eve lest she might offer it to her advisor (Satan); and I shall never give sacrifice to the Lord because I am not pure; for never shall the expelled priest have the right to do that. The foot that headed willingly towards the tree of life shall have no right to tread the site dedicated to pontiffs (and priests), and the hand that picked the forbidden fruit in Eden shall have no right to flutter over the Divine Eucharist.”

Even though the Church has prevented women from entering the sanctuary, it has allowed the wife of the priest, who was consecrated as a presbytera (*Qashishto*), and the widow, who was consecrated as a deaconess, to enter the sanctuary occasionally in the event of the absence of a priest or a deacon or any male.

It is useful as well to mention here that we, Syrians, have a rite for the consecration of presbyteras and another for the consecration of deaconesses. In his work, Nomocanon, the great scholar Mar Gregorios Abu Alfaraj Al Malati, Catholicos of the East, better known as Bar‘Ebroyo (+1286) (Sec. 7, Chap. 7), states that deaconesses were usually chosen from among pious widows who had certain qualifications such as having been married only once, and having been committed to the service of the church after becoming widows, fasting and praying and having good reputation among both family and outsiders.

The Ministry of the Deaconess

After being consecrated, the ministry of the deaconess is limited to helping the priest and deacon outside the sanctuary in the service of baptizing women and mature girls and anointing them with holy chrism. This ministry also includes visiting sick female faithful specially in homes inhabited solely by women. In this case the bishop does not send a deacon to visit them lest any doubts might arise among the unbelievers, but rather a deaconess to take care of the female faithful.

In the event a widow consecrated as a deaconess remarries, she shall be excommunicated together with the one who marries her. Certain canon laws limit the age

of the widow candidate to be consecrated as a deaconess to forty years; whereas other canons do not recommend the consecration of a deaconess before the age of sixty.

St. Severios the Great (+538) states that in the sixth century the ordination of abbesses as deaconesses was in practice in the Orient (under the jurisdiction of the Antiochean See). In the event of the unavailability of a priest or a deacon, each one of those consecrated was entitled to distribute Holy Communion to the sisters who were under their authority. They do not, however, do this service in the case of the presence of either one. The deaconess wears a stole (*uroro*) hanging down from the shoulder in the manner of an archdeacon. In the event of the unavailability of a priest or a deacon in the convent, a deaconess is entitled to enter the sanctuary (*Beth Qudsheh*), provided that she is not having her menstrual period and that she is only with her sisters where she may give them the Communion. She may not do so to males, even to little boys who are five years of age or older.

When a consecrated deaconess burns incense, she may not recite the special prayer usually recited by the priest, but inwardly recites the prayer of repentance.

She may, after obtaining

permission from the bishop, mix wine and water in the chalice; and in the event of her illness, she may allow one of the sisters to enter the sanctuary in order to clean it and light the sanctuary candles.

A deaconess shall never be blamed if she reads the Holy Scriptures, even the Holy Gospel, in a public gathering of sisters on holy days.

According to the teachings of Jacob of Edessa (+708), "The deaconess may never enter the sanctuary except to clean it or light candles. In the event of unavailability of a priest or a deacon in the convent, she may take the Communion, which is usually placed in *the Beth Qurbono*, a kind of a hole usually dug in the eastern wall behind the altar. She may not, however, come close to the altar.

She may also give Communion to the sisters and only to little boys below the age of five. She may help the priest in the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism of mature women by anointing them with holy chrism and may visit sick women."

It was the wife of the priest who was called a *presbytera*, following her consecration as such. She was also called a daughter of the covenant. The rite of her consecration is usually carried out by the bishop at the end of the

Holy Liturgy. During the service, the wife of the priest kneels down, bowing before the sanctuary while the bishop makes intercessions to God to exhort the faithful, to become like the five wise virgins who took their lamps filled with the oil of good deeds of vigilance and watch, while waiting for the second coming of the Heavenly Groom in order to go with Him to the joyous wedding and to glorify Him.

Consecration of the Deaconess

During the rite of consecration, prayers, and petitions are said for both the repentance of the one called upon for this ministry, as well as for endowment with wisdom.

Prayers center upon the parable of the virgins (Mt 25:1-13), as well as the parable of the invitation to the banquet, obliging people to enter the house of the host and share in the meal (Mt 22:1-14). The bishop then commands that the curtain be drawn to hide the one to be consecrated. Meanwhile, she takes off her bracelets and her outer garments and wears a wide blue skirt, hanging down from the waist to the toes, putting on a black girdle. She is also dressed in a black or blue coat hanging over her shoulders. Afterwards, the bishop holds a black scarf upon which he makes a triple sign of the cross, tightly on her head like a cap while

reciting the following prayer: "May the Lord protect you and shield you with His divine right hand, saving you from the temptations of the soul and body so you may obtain His bliss for ever. Amen."

Later someone reads a chapter from the Book of Acts about Peter restoring life to Tabitha (Act 9:36-42), and a selection from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians (3:12-17) commencing with: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, and beloved, bowls of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another as Christ forgave you."

Then the bishop reads Chapter ten of the Gospel of Luke, starting from verse 38 up to 42 about Martha and Mary where the Lord says to Martha: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful; and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:41-42).

At this point, the bishop makes the sign of the cross on her forehead three times, saying: "(Name of consecrated) shall be sealed, stamped and perfected, that is consecrated as an actual presbytera for the service of the children of the Holy Church.

Afterwards, the archdeacon

says in a loud voice: (Barekmor) which means "Bless, O Lord" to which the bishop adds, saying: "In the Name of the Father +", and the deacon responds, saying: "Amen." The bishop continues, saying: "and of the Son +" to which the deacon responds, saying: "Amen." Then the bishop says: "and of the Holy Spirit forever." The deacon then responds, saying: "Amen."

Afterwards, the bishop reads a silent prayer of thanksgiving and then recites a prayer for the consecrated presbytera publicly, followed by the prayer of "Oh Lord, have mercy on us" and the Lord's Prayer.

We gather from the procedures of the rite of consecration, canon laws and the powers granted to the one to be consecrated as a presbytera that the consecration of a presbytera is neither an ordination nor an office but a mere consecration appointment and dedication.

We do not know for certain the date of the discontinuance of this rite of consecration. Although we now call the wife of every priest (*Bath Qyomo*), meaning a daughter of the covenant, the same name given solely to the consecrated individual.

It is noteworthy to mention here that nowadays the wife of the priest, though not consecrated, can help her husband with the

baptism of adult females if any. The consecration of deaconesses has been recently restored and we have started consecrating some of them as choirgirls, calling them deaconesses.

The Deaconesses

Today The name of deaconess given to a choirgirl is a nominal one. During the rite of consecration, the bishop says that (name of person) is being consecrated as a deaconess in the choir. This deaconess shall not be subject to the laws that used to bind the deaconesses in the past. Neither shall she be entitled to the same rights, privileges or duties the deaconess used to previously enjoy. She is just a singer in the church. Most often she serves in religious education centers. Just like other women, she may get married, yet remain consecrated as a deaconess, serving as a singer in the choir, a teacher or a Sunday school advisor. This might be a step forward towards resumption of consecrating widows as deaconesses in the church as previously practised.

There is a possibility of having a second thought about church tradition in relation to the rights and duties of those called deaconesses or presbyteraes in terms of the services they offer to women and little children, and in relation to cleaning the sanctuary and lighting candles. In this age,

those activities that might take place in the church when needed may add to the enrichment of souls and to the progress and prosperity of the Church.

Definitely, ordination of presbyteraes, having the power of a clergy to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, as practised by some traditional non-apostolic churches, would never be permitted in our apostolic Syrian Orthodox Church. This is due to the fact that such an act is never based on the Scriptures.

For when the Lord Jesus chose twelve apostles and seventy missionaries, He never selected any of those women who were serving Him.

Likewise, a presbytera in our Church has never been ordained in the office of a clergy who has the power to absolve from sin and celebrate the Bloodless Holy Eucharist and other sacraments of the Church.

Syriac women today occupy high positions in all domains, social, cultural and religious. Women have become physicians, lawyers, judges, engineers, teachers and members of Parliament, and in the Church Council of Trustees as well as being members in charitable societies. They are choir singers and Sunday school teachers. In all these endeavors, women are equal to men in rights, duties and dignity.

1. Meeting of Orthodox Women, St Ephrem Monastery, Damascus. October 4-10, 1996 1. Biography of St. Ephrem, the Syrian by the author. Damascus, 1984.

2. لا نؤمن ان حبلا لعننا حلت بنا: ولا نؤمن ان حبلا له ربنا من حبلا له ربنا. ولا نؤمن ان حبلا له ربنا من حبلا له ربنا. ولا نؤمن ان حبلا له ربنا من حبلا له ربنا.

3. Bleelo which means weeded wheat connoting the Holy Eucharist (consecrated bread) is misspelt in Syriac as Kleelo. Speech delivered by His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas at St. Ephrem Monastery in Saydnaya at the conclusion of the meeting of Orthodox women held in Damascus from October 4-10, 1996, under the theme of Discerning the Signs of the Time and published in the Patriarchal Magazine, Nos. 157, 158, 159 of September, October and November 1996.

10 COMMON HISTORY OF THE SYRIAN CHURCH WITH ISLAM

Introduction

As we approach this important issue, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the political and religious conditions shortly before the appearance of Islam in the areas where the Syrian Church began in the early age of Christianity and in the places where Islam originated and spread after more than 600 years of Christianity. We will touch on the general situation of Christianity, the split of the church and her doctrinal differences in order to gain a better insight into the foundations of the beliefs of these two religions. We will also mention some points in broad strokes where the Christian and Islamic beliefs agree.

Who are the Syrians?

The members of the Antiochian Syrian Church represent the direct descendants of the original inhabitants of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Asia Minor, as well as Upper- and Lower Mesopotamia—that is Iraq today. Their language, Syriac-Aramaic, was the language of ancient Syria. It was also

the language our Lord Jesus Christ spoke and the language predominantly spoken in these areas when Islam appeared. Besides this, Arabic was spoken by the Arabic tribes coming from the Gulf region. These tribes had immigrated a long time earlier and lived in villages in eastern Syria and in western and northern Iraq. Along side Arabic these tribes used Syriac as an inseparable part of the Antiochian Syrian Church's liturgy. In addition to these two languages, Greek was spoken as the official language of the Byzantine colonial power and by the populations in the cities of Greek origin who were the inhabitants of the large cities. Persian was also spoken as the language of the Sassanid Empire.

Religious and Political

Conditions Before the Appearance of Islam. At the beginning of the 7th century the Antiochian Syrian Church fought with all its might for its existence, its Syriac-Aramaic heritage and its exalted Christian dogma inherited from the holy Apostles and the

spiritual, righteous Fathers. The church was weakened by the forceful persecution from both empires, namely the Byzantine and the Persian, who for generations had threatened its existence because of its geographical position. Through the enormous number of martyrs, whom the church produced through the centuries, the members gained a certain long suffering patience that allowed them to bear the oppression, distresses and deprivations as good soldiers of Christ. Added to that was the appearance of extreme opinions in religion and the kindling of dogmatic confrontations as an occasion to study theology more deeply.

Furthermore it drove its scientists to combine Common History of the Syrian Church with Islam theology with the science of philosophy as a weapon to use against heretical statements and to defend the truth of religious dogma.

The Syrians were so famous for their love of science that they founded a school beside every church. Their monasteries became faculties for theology and other sciences. The church suffered under this division. It changed from a spiritual institution that strove for the salvation of souls into a battlefield where

christological conflicts were carried out inconsiderately. This situation led to doubt in the hearts of the believers and to a weakening of the faith.

In addition to this, the Roman empire was divided into two camps after the death of the Emperor Constantine: namely the West-Roman, using Latin, and the East-Roman that used Greek and was called the Byzantine empire. Most of the Syrian areas were under the rule of the Byzantine empire, while the rest were under the rule of the Persians. The Byzantine and Persian empires were in conflict with each other over control of the Orient leading to constant wars between them.

The Christian

Creed Because of the appearance of some foreign religious ideas that deviated from the exalted dogma of the church, the Christian Creed was determined by the two ecumenical councils, which took place in Nicea in 325 A.D. and in Constantinople in 381 A.D. In the first council Arius was excommunicated for stating that Jesus was no more than the logos created by God whom he had sent to humanity as a religious messenger. He stated: "The Father existed before the Son was there. Then God created the Son who became His logos. The Son was created like the rest of creation.

The Father gave him all power and he made heaven and earth.”

In the second council Macedonius was excommunicated for denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit and said that the Holy Spirit was created by the Son and he is his servant.

At the above councils the areas of jurisdiction were also determined for the three apostolic Sees of Rome, Antioch and Alexandria, then the fourth See Constantinople. In the last council the prerogatives of these Sees were also determined after their geographical location and their closeness to the centers of civil and political power.

The Split of the Syrian Church

These constant dogmatic debates between the Christian churches alienated the churches from each other and culminated in the split of the church. Hardest hit by this split was the Syrian church. It happened as a result of the anathematizing of Nestorius at the council of 431 A.D. in Ephesus. Nestor claimed that Jesus embodies two persons: God, the logos, and Jesus, the human. Because God cannot be subjected to natural influences, Mary only gave birth to the human Jesus, and therefore she cannot be called “Mother of God” (Theotokos). This means that Christ has two persons and two separate natures. (With this he

cast doubt on the Christian faith of the Holy Trinity).

The Syrians, who accepted Nestor’s ideas and did not follow the canon of Ephesus, were called Nestorians. They were persecuted by the Byzantine Empire. Thus, they fled to the Persian empire in South-Mesopotamia. In this way the Syrian church was divided into two. The Syrians living west of the Euphrates were called ‘Syrians of the West’ and they came directly under the Patriarch of Antioch.

Those living east of the river Euphrates - also in Iraq - were called the ‘Syrians of the East’, most of them were Nestorians, except those who still came under the See of Antioch. Because of this geographical division, the Syrian language split into two dialects, namely the West-Syrian and the East-Syrian.

The ‘Syrians of the West’ living in the Persian empire had to suffer heavily under oppression by the Persians. This happened not just because of their faith but because its spiritual leadership was residing in the hostile Byzantine empire. They were therefore accused of disloyalty.

When the Byzantine empire adopted the resolutions of the council of Chalcedon in 451, they began to oppress those who rejected these resolutions - first and foremost the members of the

Syrian church. The church fathers and the believers had to endure various agonies like bans, killings and incarceration. Many of them, both clergy and laity, gained martyrdom.

Justinus I carried out one of these oppression against the members of the Syrian, Coptic and Armenian churches after his ascension to the Byzantine throne in 518 A.D. Because of that Patriarch Severius the Great was forced to make his way to Egypt.

There he lived for 20 years and led the church through his representatives and letters. After the death of Justinus I in the year 527 A.D. his nephew Justinian ascended the throne and with him his wife Theodora, the daughter of a priest from Manbij in Syria. She had pity for the oppressed, the banned and the incarcerated Syrians in Constantinople. For political and administrative considerations, she was not able to stop the oppression because the followers of the council of Chalcedon would have accused her husband of siding with the banned Syrians and being under the influence of his wife.

The Ghassanid Arabs had already founded an important Emirate. The Byzantine emperor commissioned their princes ("the Gafnan") with the reign over Syria. They were supposed to secure the

border of the Byzantine empire against the attacks of the Arab tribes allied with the Persians. The Ghassanians held fast to their Syrian Church and defended its dogma.

Empress Theodora met the wish of king Al Hareth Ibn Gabla to send some bishops into the areas occupied by the Byzantine Empire. She asked Patriarch Theodosius the Alexandrian, who was banned to Constantinople with Antimos the Patriarch of Constantinople, to consecrate the monk Jacob Baradäus as Metropolitan of Edessa, Syria and Asia Minor, as well as to consecrate the monk Theodor the Arab as Metropolitan of the Arabs in Bosra in 543 or 544 A.D.

Immediately after the consecration, Mor Jacob went to work. Untiring he moved on foot with amazing speed from town to town incognito, disguised as a layman and always pursued by the Byzantine powers. In this way he crossed Syria, Armenia, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Rhodes, Chios, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mesopotamia, Persia and many more places strengthening the true faith of believers.

With two assistants whom he ordained as bishops according to the church canons he consecrated 27 bishops. With this he strengthened the members of

the Syrian Orthodox Church as well as the Coptic and Armenian Churches in the faith that was decided on in the three ecumenical councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus. He also consecrated thousands of priests and deacons. Thus, the great apostolic striver was able to strengthen the foundations of the Syrian Church. As a result of this and out of hate and anger, the Syrian Church was called the Jacobite Church by its enemies. Although the Syrian Church is proud of Mor Jacob it rejects this name because Mor Jacob was neither its founder nor the author of a new dogma. He was one of its spiritual fathers who strengthened its members in the right faith they had received from the Apostles and the righteous church fathers. His steadfast holding up in the face of the Byzantine injustices is unprecedented and the church will always be proud of him. The church also holds the strong belief that the Lord Jesus lives in her midst and that "the gates of hell will not overcome it."

At the beginning of the 7th century Heraklios (610-641 A.D.) ascended the throne of the East-Roman Empire. After he defeated the Persians and conquered Mesopotamia, he forced his way into Syria in 612 A.D. In 629 A.D. he occupied Damascus. Following that he tried earnestly to restore the religious unity in his empire

to unite the Syrians, Copts and Armenians with the Byzantines. This happened on the one hand through promises and on the other hand through threats. Very often he used ruthless oppression through which many Syrians, Copts, and Armenians became martyrs. The persecution of the Syrian Church by the Byzantine Empire did not end until the appearance of Islam.

Only through the campaigns of Islam in the first half of the 7th century was it possible to free the East from the Byzantines and the Persians. This happened with the help of the members of the Syrian Church; the original inhabitants of Syria of whom one part was of Aramaic origin who inhabited these areas for generations and another part was of Arabic origin. When the Arab Muslims marched into Syria they were welcomed by the Syrians who saw the new rulers as saviors who freed them from the yoke of the Byzantines because the Byzantines tried by force to assimilate them into the Byzantine Church. This was the church of the empire and membership in it would have meant compulsorily acceptance of the resolutions of Chalcedon: that Christ had two natures, the human eating, drinking and feeling pain and the divine making miracles. This would have been a denial of the dogma of their church fathers. The Syrians were also able through the

cooperation with the Arab Muslims to retain their ecclesiastical dogma, the Antiochian See, their churches, monasteries, ecclesiastical inheritance and their liturgy.

The Position of the Syrians Toward the Islamic Conquest

From the above it becomes clear that the religious conflicts in the Christian church, the attempts of the Byzantine powers to force the issues of the council of Chalcedon upon the other churches by force, to throw its members in prison, to kill them, to ban them and to drive them out alienated the Syrian Christians. All these unchristian deeds only sowed hate and aversion in the hearts of the Syrians against the Byzantine powers. The Persian powers in their empire oppressed both West and East Syrians in general to force them under tyrannical policies and Zoroastrian beliefs. Therefore the Syrians under the Byzantine and Persian powers saw the Islamic conquerors as liberators and not as occupiers. The Syrians put great hope in them, not only because the Muslims liberated them from their religious trouble but also because they relieved the Syrians of the burdensome taxes that were placed on their backs. They said, "*Praise be to God, who delivered us from the unjust Byzantines and who put us under the rule of the just Muslim Arabs.*"

The Religious Situation of the Arabs at the Time of the Rise of Islam The religious situation of the Arabs was confusing and disorganized. Some tribes were totally pagan. The split of the church distracted them from their task of spreading the Gospel. Thus, the time was favorable for the appearance of Islam on the Arab peninsula. We have to mention here that one part of the population of the Arab peninsula was pagan at the time of the appearance of Islam. The others were in name only followers of Abraham. It is mentioned in history that Christianity appeared in the first century on the peninsula. It spread with strength in the Syrian desert and in Iraq among many tribes like, Beni Taghleb, Beni Kalb; in Yemen, Tai, Bahraa, Salikh, Tennuch, Ghassaen and others who thus were prepared for accepting Islam later.

The dogma of Arius and Nestor that was anathematized at the ecumenical councils of Nicea (325 A.D.) and Ephesus (431 A.D.) were wide spread among the Christians on the peninsula. Added to this is that through rebellious members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church some doubtful heretical religious statements in the name of Christianity were spread among some Arab tribes.

At the end of the 6th and

the beginning of the 7th century, Qas Ibn-Sa-ida Al-Ayadi, bishop of Najran, was praised for his wisdom, poetry and the art of speech. Another famous man is named Waraqa Ibn Naufal Ibn Assad (who died about the year 611). He was the bishop of Mekka that was full of Christians.

He was the cousin of Khadidga, daughter of Khuailid, the wife of Muhammad, the prophet. Most of the Christians of Mecca, Yemen and Najran were members of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The majority of Qurash was Christian. (The Christians were called 'Nazarians' after Jesus.) As manifold as the different dogma of the Christians of the Arab peninsula might have been, they exercised a great influence upon their Arab Muslims there.

We do not want to forget that the main religious dogma of Christianity and Islam are close to each other, such as the belief in one God who made heaven and earth, the belief in the day of judgment, the day of the resurrection, eternal life, heaven and hell, etc.

There are also historical-religious events of the Syrians, which are mentioned in the Quran, like the Legend of the Cave and The Martyrs of the Furrow. For the Syrians the Legend of the Cave was an event with which God proves that He, the creator, can bring

back to life the dead on the day of the resurrection. It was handed down in the Syriac language in excellent style, verse and prose. It belongs to the Syrian tradition and was studied thoroughly also by the great chroniclers like Zachariah the Rhetor (+536), John of Ephesus (+587), the Monk of Zuqnin (+775) and others. We also have a poem, containing 74 verses in 7-syllable meter, by Mor Jacob of Serugh (+521). The church remembers these Seven Sleepers on November 24 every year. They have their own liturgical prayer in which the truth of their sleeping and awakening is documented and handed down.

The Martyrs of the Furrow who are mentioned in the Quran are the Himyarite martyrs, the Syrian-Christian Arabs of Najran, who were persecuted by Mashruq the Jew, known as Dhu Nuwas, and thus gained martyrdom.

Islam From the View of the Scientists of the Syrian Church

All of the Syrian scientists who occupied themselves with the biography of the prophet Muhammad described his qualities and noble character traits. Because of lack of space we will content ourselves with the testimony of Bar Haebraus, Maphrian of the East (1286 A.D.) who summarized the life of the prophet Muhammad in his book Chronicle of the

Dynasties as follows: "(Muhammad Ibn Abdallah, Peace be upon him): The biographies of Muhammad mentioned that he is from Ishmael, the son of Abraham, whom Hagar gave birth to . . . He was born in Mecca in the year 882 (after the Seleucid era that is 571 A.D.). When he was about two years old, his father Abdallah died. His mother, Amina, the daughter of Wahab, stayed with him for six years. After her death his grandfather Abdul Muttaleb took him and vouched for him. When he was about to die, he asked his son Abu Talib to take care of him. When he was nine years old, his uncle took him along to Syria.

When they arrived in Bosra, a clairvoyant monk called Bahira met them and stepped towards them. When he came to the child, he held his hand and said: 'This boy will become a great man, and his fame will go across borders because when he came he was shaded by a cloud.' When he was 25 years old an honorable, noble and rich woman called Khadija offered that he run her business in Syria. She wanted to pay him more than anyone else. He took the offer. Then she wanted to marry him and offered herself in marriage. She was 40 years old when he married her. They lived 22 years together. Then she died in Mecca. When Muhammad turned 40 he began his mission.

After the death of his uncle and his wife, the tribe of "Quarisch"

harmed him so he emigrated to Al-Medina (which is Yathrib). In the first year of his emigration he was celebrated by the people and they supported him against his enemies in Mecca... In the 10th year of his emigration he went on his last pilgrimage and in this year he got sick. Two days before the end of the month Safar, on a Monday, he died at the age of 63. The people of Mecca wanted to bury him in Mecca where he was born. The population of Al-Medina, however, wanted to bury him in their city because he emigrated there. Others, for their part, wanted to bury him in Jerusalem because that was the place where prophets were buried. In the end all parties agreed to bury him in Al-Medina in the same room where he had died."

To gain a better overview of the prophet, we add to the before mentioned The messenger Muhammad converted the Arabs during their feast gatherings and many believed in his teachings. He had to leave Mecca to evade the persecution of the Qurischians. The population of Al-Medina welcomed him and supported him. Later he had to take up the sword to protect the fruits of his mission from its enemies. Therefore, he armed armies and led invasions. Among the important wars is the great Badr invasion in which the Muslims won a great victory.

Among the good deeds of the

Muslims are counted the buying of the prisoners' freedom through teaching: The money to buy the prisoners freedom was collected in that every prisoner of Quarisch had to teach ten children of Al-Medina reading and writing. The wealthy could buy their relatives free with money also. Before every invasion the messenger instructed his armies with these words: *"You will find men who withdrew into cells; do not disturb them, kill no woman, no child, no old man and do not cut down a tree."*

In this way the messenger Muhammad wanted to proclaim his message in the world as brotherly and just and by keeping freedom and human rights. Whoever studies the Quran in-depth will understand that the messenger Muhammad was not sent to force people into Islam. The following verses in the Quran confirm this truth: "It is not for you to guide them: God guides whom he will." (Sura 2, The Cow, verse 27). "There is no compulsion in matters of faith. Distinct is the way of guidance now from error. He who turns away from the forces of evil and believes in God, will surely hold fast to a handle that is strong and unbreakable, for God hears all and knows every thing." (Sura 2, The Cow, verse 256) "And tell the people of the book and the heathens: 'Do you submit?' If they do, they will find the right path;

if they turn away, your duty is to deliver the message.

And God keeps an eye on His votaries." (Sura 3, The Family of Imran, verse 20) "Call them to the path of your Lord with wisdom and words of good advice; and reason with them in the best way possible. Your Lord surely knows who strays from his path, and he knows those who are guided the right way." (Sura 16, The Bees, verse 125) "We have sent down this book to you with the truth for all humanity. So, he who comes to guidance does so for himself, and he who goes astray does so for his own loss; on you does not lie their guardianship." (Sura 39, The Small Groups, verse 41) The Quran speaks for the Christians and recognizes their holy books through the following verses: "If you are in doubt of what we have sent down to you then ask those who have been reading the Book (for a long time) before you. The truth has indeed come to you from your Lord, so do not be one of those who doubt." (Sura 10, Jonah, verse 94) "You will find the Jews and idolaters most excessive in hatred of those who believe; and the closest in love to the faithful are the people who say: 'we are the followers of Christ,' because there are priests and monks among them, and they are not arrogant." (Sura 5, The Feast, verse 82) The Quran also attests, that Jesus was not born of human

conception but that God breathed his Spirit into Mary. In addition there are sayings in the Quran that summarize the supernatural appearance of Christ. The Quran attests also the creative power of Jesus Christ. This testimony was not given to anybody else. Thus, it says the following in the Sura of Al Umran: The angels said: "O Mary, God gives you a new thing from Him, for rejoicing, (news of one) whose name will be Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in this world and the next, and one among the honored, who will speak to the people when in the cradle and when in the prime of life, and will be among the upright and doers of good." She said: "How can I have a son, O Lord, when no man has touched me." He said: "That is how God creates what he wills. When he decrees a thing, he says, 'Be', and it is. He will teach him the Law and the judgment, and the Torah and the Gospel, and he will be Apostle to the children of Israel, (saying:) 'I have come to you with a prodigy from your Lord that I will fashion the state of destiny out of mire for you, and breathe (a new spirit) into it, and you will rise by the will of God. I will heal the blind and the leper, and infuse life into the dead, by the leave of God. I will tell you what you devour and what you hoard in your homes. In this will be a portent for you if you do believe."

(Sura 3, The Family of Imran, verse 45-49) The messenger Muhammad also gave all Christians a covenant, which we will repeat because of its importance. In it is shown the noble character and sense of justice of the Messenger. This testimony is kept still in some monasteries until this day.

He said: "In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful! This is a writing written by Muhammad Ibn Abdallah to all people as messenger, preacher, admonisher, and the one responsible so that nothing is kept from the messengers of God. God is powerful and wise. He writes it for the Christians all over the earth who live here or abroad, who speak Arabic or other languages, known and unknown. He gives them a covenant. He who annuls it, who practices the opposite, who oversteps the commandments, annuls the testament of God, denies its agreement, laughs about his religion, and earns a curse whoever he is, a ruler or another Muslim.

When a monk or someone passes through seeking refuge on a mountain, in a valley, in a cave, in a house, on flat land, on sand or in a church, then I with my helpers, relatives, my tribe and my followers will do what they can for him with enthusiasm because he is a member of the community and stands under my protection

and I keep all harm from him. The persons affected shall only be taxed with so much tax as they are freely willing to pay without force or pressure; no bishop shall be moved from his bishopric, no monk from his monastery, no hermit from his cell to another city; no one passing through shall be hindered in his traveling. No house, no church building shall be torn down. None of the riches of their churches shall be used either for the building of a mosque or a house for Muslims. Whoever does anything like this violates the testament of God and his messengers. The bishops and God's workers shall be burdened with neither taxes nor fines. I protect them wherever they may be - be they on land or on sea, in the east or in the west, in the north or in the south.

They are under my protection and safe from any need.

Added to this is: Whoever prays to God as a hermit in the mountains or in a blessed place does not have to pay for the sowing, nor the taxes, nor the tithing; one is not allowed to take a part because they only earn their own living and nobody helps them with their harvest. They are also not required to go to sea. The land and estate owners shall not pay more than twelve Dirham's per year; none of them shall be burdened with excesses and one shall not debate

with them but rather do better than them as a good example, showing mercy and keeping them from tragedies.

When Christianity has come under the rule of Islam then the Muslims shall be satisfied to let them pray in their churches and no obstacle shall stand between them and their inclination to religion. Whoever violates God's testament, who does the opposite, is disobedient before God and his messenger. The Muslims shall be helpful to them, the Christians, with the restoration of their churches and houses. None of them is obliged to carry weapons because the Muslims protect them. Nobody shall offend against this testament until the day of the last judgment and until the end of the world."

The Syrians and the Arab-Islamic Conquests

There were many psychological, social and religious reasons for the Syrians, the indigenous inhabitants in the Byzantine Syria, to welcome the Muslim Arab conquerors coming out of the Arab peninsula. Because the Syrians, as we have mentioned above, suffered a lot under the Byzantine yoke in Syria. They were also oppressed by the Persians because the Persians tried to force the Syrians to pay high taxes and through barbaric treatment and bloodshed to force

them to switch from their faith to their Zoroastrian religion. The apparent reason for the oppression of the Syrians by the Byzantines was the rejection of the resolutions of Chalcedon (451 A.D.). The true reason, however, was the fact that from the Syrian's national consciousness thoughts of freedom movements flamed up anew. They wanted to free their country from the colonizing Byzantine control. In addition the Byzantines robbed Syria of its wealth - especially its wheat. It is not surprising that an inner resistance spread in the hearts of the Syrians because of the Byzantine oppression so that the Syrians welcomed the Muslim Arabs as liberators of their country. This happened especially because many Arab tribes in Iraq and Syria were members of the Syrian Orthodox faith. These tribes felt obliged to support the Arabic Muslims despite the difference of their faith for they were related by blood, language, and culture.

Thus most of them, like the tribes Taghlecb, Uqail, Tennuch and Rabia in the north and west of Iraq, joined the Muslim fighters under the leadership of Al-Muthanna Ibn Haritha and fought with them. In the year 651 A.D. the Persians were defeated and their last king Yezed Jared fled the country.

History tells us that a Syrian Christian boy from the Taghlecbites killed the Persian leader Marzaban

Mihran took his horse and shouted with a loud voice: "I have killed Marzaban." The conquering army marched towards Byzantine Syria. they entered Damascus in 634 A.D. and Jerusalem 637 A.D. They came to Alexandria in the year 638 where they were welcomed by the Copts in the same way as they had been welcomed by the Syrians in Syria before.

The Syrians Under the Islamic Rule

Keeping their faith, the Syrians fought together with the Muslim Arabs against the colonists and freed their land and afterwards they supported them in the building of a new empire.

History tells of their creative power in all areas of science and culture. Despite our lack of time we want to dwell on a few points of the common history between Syrians and Muslims and acknowledge the positive events from the reports of trustworthy chroniclers, avoiding the negative events because they do not build up. At the same time we assure you that the unjust deeds on the side of the Arab-Muslim army during and after the conquest happened relatively seldom in comparison to similar conquests of other armies. We are going to mention the names of a group of Syrian characters who found favor with the Islamic Arab rulers and served them faithfully, which at the same time held fast

onto the Christian faith and their Syrian Church. This leads us also to the strong relationship between Islamic Arabs and sons of the Syrian Church and the fact that holding fast to Christianity does not oppose pride in one's nation or faithful service to it.

The Viscount Philip de Tarazi says in his book *The Golden Era of the Syrians*: "The Syrians won the trust and respect of the 'Rashidic' caliphs (632-661), the caliphs of the Ommayyads (662-746) and the Abbasids (750-1258). The first Syrian who won their trust was Mansur Ibn Johanna the Syrian who became finance minister in the epoch of the 'Raschids'. His son Sargon as well as his grandson John -known as Saint John of Damascus (749) - took over the office of work and tax income in the reign of the Ommayyads."

The Caliphates' Treatment of the Syrians and All Christians

Umar Ibn Al-Khattab was the first "Rashidic" Caliph who was called the "Emir Al- Muminin" (Prince of the Believers). He also was called "Al Faruk" because he knew how to distinguish between justice and injustice. The Syrians confirmed this name but interpret it differently. The Syrians say that the word stems from the Syriac word "Faruqo" which means savior. This name was given to the divine savior, Jesus Christ, and then to

the "Rashidic" Caliph Umar. They gave out the slogan: "Thanks be to God who liberated us from the rule of the oppressive Byzantines and who put us under the rule of the just Muslim Arabs." Of this historical position of the Syrians' gratefulness to Muslims and the honoring of their good deeds we want to recount a few exemplary deeds by the Muslim Caliphs.

Of all these deeds we must name the famous action of Umar Ibn Al Khattab in Jerusalem. When the Caliph was visiting Jerusalem he found himself in the nave of the Church of the Resurrection during prayer time. He did not want to pray in this church but instead he went outside and prayed alone on the step in front of it. When asked for the reason he answered: "If I had prayed in that church then the Muslims would have turned that church into a mosque after my death and said: "Umar has prayed here." Then he ordered the Muslims in a document to pray on the step of a church only one at a time, not to say community prayers and not to call upon God with a loud voice. Many written documents stem from Umar in which he grants safety and protection to Syrian-Christian churches as well as their monasteries. The treatment of the Christians was positive and the Christians paid their taxes in return for their protection like those who were under Persian

rule. One of the negatives that took place during the reign of Caliph Umar Ibn Al-Khattab was the document that contains Umar's conditions that did not preserve the honor of the Christians.

The Syrians were granted a good position by the Ommayads. Many of them were appointed to administrative offices and during their era the Arabic scientific renaissance began in which many Syrian scientists and authors participated through translating their sciences as well as the Greek ones into Arabic. They reached high positions in the administration and occupied important offices.

So, we see that caliph Abdul Malek Ibn Marwan (685-705) entrusted Athanasius Bar Gumoya, the Syrian from Edessa, with the administration of finances in Egypt. He proved himself through his time of service with regard to government income significantly benefiting for the Ommayads.

Caliph Marwan (744-750) wrote in the year 746 a letter of authorization (Firman) for Patriarch Iwannis IV (740-755) which authorized the Patriarch to conduct all church business independently. This was the first document of its kind that was given to a Syrian Patriarch. From this point on it became the custom to hand out such a letter of authorization (Firman).

It is important to report that the translation of the Gospels from Syriac into Arabic took place in this epoch through Patriarch John Abu Sederatt (+648). With this translation he fulfilled the wish of Prince Umair Ibn Saad Ibn Abi Waqqas, Prince of Mesopotamia. It is worth mentioning that the prince asked for the passages in the translation that dealt with the divinity of Jesus (regarding the crucifixion and the baptism) to be cut out. To this the Patriarch replied heroically: "*God prevent that cut or add one single letter even if all the spears of your army were pointed at me.*" The prince was impressed with the heroic position of the Patriarch and entrusted him with the translation. For the implementation of this translation the Patriarch called together some bishops and linguists of both Syriac and Arabic from the tribes of the Bani Tennuch, Uqail and Tai. They then translated the holy gospels under his supervision which he then handed over to the prince.

At the time of the Ommayads there lived a famous poet named Al Ahtal. He belonged to the Taghleab tribe and was a member of the Syrian Orthodox Church. He was born in Mesopotamia and grew up there. He enjoyed a good reputation among the caliphs of the Ommayads. Caliph Abdul Mallek Ibn Marwan (685 - 705)

said to him after the poet praised this Caliph in one of his poems: "Oh Ahtal, do you want that I write to all countries and tell them that you are the best poet of the Arabs?" Ahtal replied to this: "It is enough when the prince of the believers says it."

Ahtal held on to his faith. He was allowed to visit the Caliph Abdul Malak without permission, wearing a silk robe and with a golden chain around his neck on which hung a golden cross. His bishop is said to have locked him up once in the church because of harassment and abuse, although the poet said about himself: "I have not written a satirical poem about anyone that a virgin could not have written about her father." Then when one of the noble Arabs asked for his release and the poet was released by the bishop, the noble Arab asked the poet with astonishment: "How can a man with such high regards from the caliph tolerate such a shameful punishment from a bishop?" Ahtal answered: "It is the religion, it is the religion. Be silent with the silent!" In the era of the Abbasids, many excellent translations were made and from the ranks of the Syrians many great scientists, translators and doctors emerged. At the time of Harun Al-Rashid (766 - 809) the Syrian scientist Johanna Ibn Masaweh became famous. Caliph Harun Al-Rashid

entrusted him with the translation of the old books. He enjoyed a good reputation with the Caliph and his successors until the Caliph Al Mutawakkel. Thus the Syrians translated the Greek sciences into their language and then into Arabic. The Syrians founded universities for the various sciences and literature. Therefore, the sciences developed enormously during the era of the Abbasids.

The Syrians participated faithfully in the tasks of the state. As an example we report about Patriarch Dionysius of Tel Mahri (845) whom caliph Al Mamun (813 - 833) entrusted with a political mission. He went to Egypt in order to cooperate with the Caliph and with Patriarch Yosab of Alexandria in pulling down the threatening Christian revolt in the lower Nile.

Among the Syrians who served the successors of the Abbasids was the famous doctor and secretary of state Abu Karam Saaed Ibn Touma of Baghdad who is to be mentioned for his noble character, Christian virtue, his faithfulness and sincerity. He enjoyed the full trust of Caliph Al-Naser (1180 - 1225), he even was his favorite. The Caliph entrusted him with all his family and state secrets. Now it happened that the eyesight of the Caliph got worse and for that reason he asked a woman Sit Nasim to write all his papers for him. The handwriting of

the woman was very much like that of the Caliph. When she handed the minister a paper, the minister thought it was from the Caliph himself and executed the orders contained therein. She hatched a plot with a eunuch named Tag Ed-Din Rashiq, in which she sent forged letters to the minister. In the course of time the prime minister became suspicious and asked the doctor and minister of state Abu Karam Saaed Ibn Touma of Baghdad about the health of the Caliph. The doctor reported on the health condition of the caliph and also reported that a woman was writing all letters instead of the caliph. When the woman noticed that she was exposed she sent someone who killed the Minister of State.

At the time when the Tartars occupied large areas of Asia and Europe, the armies under the leadership of Genghis Khan in the 13th century gained their decisive striking power. In this time the wise Syrian Abu Salem of Malta (Malatya) - known as Ibn Kraba - served Sultan Ala-Ed-Din Kaybaqad (1219 - 1236) and enjoyed a good reputation.

History also mentions that the Patriarch Ignatius IV (1264 - 1283) went to the capital of the Tartars ("Attaq") and visited Holako. From him he received an authorization letter (Firman) for his Antiochian Patriarchate.

Another time the Patriarch was on his way to visit king Abaqa - the son of Holako - and his heir to the throne. From him he again received an authorization letter (Firman). The monk-priest Schemun the Syrian was Holako's private doctor. In the year 1258 Baghdad fell to the Mongols who then professed Islam in 1295. Professor Wolfgang Hage said in a lecture about Syrian history: "The Syrian Orthodox Church as well as the other churches in the Near East were weakened when at the end of the 13th century the Mongols, penetrating from inner Asia, professed Islam and were not as just as the Muslim Arabs. Oriental Christianity was literally decimated finally through the cruel representative of the Mongolian-Islamic fanaticism: Timur the Lame (1336 - 1405) around 1400 went through Mesopotamia, Syria and Asia Minor and understood himself as the deadly enemy of Christianity. He destroyed Baghdad in 1393. He forced the Syrians and the other Christians to accept Islam and persecuted those who refused. Many of them were martyred.

Diseases followed the massacres and only ten percent of the Christians remained." This historical truth that Professor Wolfgang has mentioned reveals that our people suffered in that historical era at the hand of a non-

Arab Muslim leader who didn't honor the covenants that were given to the Christians by the Arab prophet and the rightly guided caliphs and the Ommayads and the Abbasids to protect them and their rights. He did not respect the covenants but he slaughtered them and destroyed their churches, monasteries and schools. Most of their precious manuscripts were lost and this is considered a great loss to all civilized humanity.

Holding this before one's eyes, one does not have to emphasize what undescrivable misery, harm, deprivation and death the people in this region suffered. Over and above that we do not have to mention what irretrievable works of the different areas of science and especially theology have been lost through the burning of churches, monasteries and schools. "During these centuries the Syrian Orthodox Church shrunk to a small faith community who in modern times lived in a united area again (now the Ottoman) but was never able to regain their former size and importance."

At the beginning of the 15th century the Ottomans conquered a great part of Asia Minor. In the middle of the 15th century - also in the year 1453 - the Byzantine empire collapsed with the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans.

In this quick journey through

the centuries we stopped at certain points along the way where we thought it useful. We got to know some of the religious, scientific and political personalities. We also tried to uncover the background reasons for the decline in membership and the suffering of the Syrian church over the centuries. Now we know how she fought to survive and what she did to protect her inheritance as well as her faith.

After she survived weakened by the fight with the Byzantine rule, she breathed a sigh of relief with the rise of Islam. There was cooperation in peaceful and unsettled times. We have also seen how their relationship with the Muslim authorities changed like the ebb and flow of the sea and how the church fathers went about it according to the commandment of Jesus Christ: "so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves!" (Mt 10:16).

After the fall of the empire of the Abbassids the land came under the rule of a variety of non-Arab Muslim sultans. Unsure times began for the churches: They lost many of their members. They were further weakened when the Ottomans took power and after strengthening of their ruling power played with the destinies of the people.

The most dangerous enemy, however, that attacked and almost

destroyed the Syrian Orthodox Church at its foundation was the ignorance and the spiritual irresponsibility that spread out in their own ranks at the end of the 13th century. The chaos began to get out of hand when hate, tribal thinking and provincialism broadened. This chaotic state of the church is also explainable from the fact that the church had three Antiochian patriarchs at the same time: one in Sis who was followed by the Syrians of Cilikia, one in Tur Abdin for the people there, and one in Mardin for all Syrians of the East. The patriarchate of Tur Abdin lasted 130 years and the one in Sis 152 years. In this way they tore the body of Christ apart. When the Patriarch Behnam Hadi Al Bartali reigned on the See of Mardin (1412), he was able to bring about the unity of the Syrian-Antiochian See. He died in 1454. Because we are trying to uncover the reasons for the growing weakening of the church we have to go into the terrible happenings of the years 1895, and especially 1915 - 1921, in which the church had to suffer from the Ottomans. During these years the church lost thousands upon thousands of innocent martyrs although the church was very loyal to the land of its grandfathers. She obeyed the civil power. The church has rejected the patronage of foreign governments because she has firm

faith that God will protect her." Despite the low numbers of church members the Syrian Church was able to reconsolidate. The church believes firmly that her existence until now is a sign that God lives in her midst, strengthens her, lets her flourish and not disintegrate. She embodies now the faith handed down by the holy apostles and the Syrian inheritance deeply rooted in her history. She tries to preserve her holy Syriac language, the language of Jesus. She seeks a constructive cooperation with all peoples of the earth for the welfare of all humanity.

Time does not allow us to talk about the relationship between the Syrian Church and Islam and others in this time. That is because the geographical location of the Syrian Church has expanded through the emigration of its children all over the world and their different relationships with many peoples who believe in many faiths.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am glad to thank you for your patience and attentiveness and express my thanks to the honorable authorities at Humboldt University in Berlin for inviting me and giving me a chance to talk to them.

You will surely share my opinion that the fear, terror and persecution the Syrian Christians

in the whole world had suffered throughout the ages was from the oppression of strange governments. Also, disasters had repeatedly arisen as a result of the distance from God by some Syrians and other Christians through their distancing themselves from the sources of Christian teaching and its translation into good works.

Therefore, even in this generation we shouldn't be surprised to hear from some who have studied the Gospels and got to know Jesus Christ what once Gandhi - the leader of the Indian independence movement - said: "We want your Christ but not your Christianity." This may also be true for our brothers the Muslims. But we do not want to judge the others. We want to call ourselves to account. The split of the Christian church is a big mistake, a blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and an ignoring of the existence of Christ who promised: "... the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Mt 16:18) I invite you to stand before history for a moment to see the result of our divisions. You will see the bloodshed of thousands of innocents, righteous men have suffered and been expelled from their countries. We thank God that Christian churches

in this generation began to feel the necessity of continuing the Christian dialogue and as a result they have drawn closer to each other and planned for continuous meetings at various levels to study different subjects. The unity of Christianity can only happen in and around Christ, who is the head of the church and we with all our doctrines are only parts of the holy body of Christ.

Satan is still at work. He brings about disturbances, constantly encourages new splits and wants from this the tearing apart of the body of Christ, that is the Church. We have to be careful. Politics usually uses religion to reach its worldly goals. We should limit our talks to spiritual themes because the kingdom of Christ is not of this world. We do not want the unity of Christianity to fight against other religions. Instead we want unity to reach our goal more quickly; that is the constructive dialogue with others who believe in God and here especially with the Muslims with whom we share one homeland. Let us learn from history. Let us avoid what splits us. Let us walk the way that leads to a better understanding, to a life in which love and peace rule."

Lecture at the Humboldt University, Berlin *Patriarchal Journal*, vol. 33, no. 146 (June 1995), pp. 322-344. Maren Tyedmers Hange assisted with this translation.

A Collection of Articles by
His Holiness Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

Edited by
Dr. Kuriakose Corepiscopa Moolayil

The Holy Patriarchs of Antioch in history is well known for their literary output right from St. Peter the apostle. Mor Ignatius Noorono, Mor Severius of Antioch and Mor Michael Robo are a few among these luminaries. The Patriarchs of the twentieth century are also of the same feather. Mor Ignatius Aprem I and Mor Yacoob III are well known for their researches and contributions. The present Patriarch is also a versatile genius in all aspects of ecclesiastical life. This volume of the collected works of His Holiness Zakka I is a spectrum of his scholastic life. The first two articles are on the identity of the church and on its traditions. The third one is very important to all students of Christology. It gives a systematic approach to the one nature of God the incarnated word. The following articles are also worth study to understand the basic faith of the Syriac Church. His Grace Mathew Mor Aprem Metropolitan is the prime motivator in publishing these articles in the present book form.



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